

ASSESSING THE PRESIDENT'S STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:40 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. With the approval of the ranking member, we are going to start. And thank you very much. The subcommittee will come to order.

After recognizing myself and the ranking member for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then recognize any other member seeking recognition for 1 minute. We will then hear from our witnesses. Thank you for your patience. Without objection the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record and members may have 5 days to insert statements and/or questions for the record subject to the length and limitations in the rules. The chair now recognizes herself for a loosely defined 5 minutes.

As we are all aware, earlier this week the Department of State issued a notice warning of a possible imminent attack in Kabul. With so much of our attention focused on the threat from ISIS and the problems in Syria, Iraq, and Iran, it is important that we do not lose sight of some of the other areas of concern for our national security interests, and this security warning is a stark reminder of that.

It took a resurgent Taliban seizing control of Kunduz for President Obama to adjust his strategy, announcing a halt to the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. It was an acknowledgement that the strategy of gradual withdraw was not in line with the reality on the ground. Yet concerns remain that the President isn't leaving behind enough troops to support our objectives in Afghanistan. What was lost in the discussion was the fact that Afghan security forces were able to regain Kunduz back from the Taliban.

Our military leaders on the ground feel confident that the Afghan security forces have done a good job fighting during this season, and are more professional than the Iraqi security forces. Today our core mission is to train, to advise, and to assist the Afghan se-

curity forces, and to conduct counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda and its many affiliates.

Last month I led a bipartisan congressional delegation (code) visit and was pleased to be joined by one of our members of our subcommittee, Dr. Yoho, to Afghanistan to meet with our troops carrying out this important mission, as well as to discuss pressing issues with President Ghani, CEO Abdullah, General Campbell, and other U.S. military leaders. I had also visited in 2013 when we met with President Karzai.

The one thing that was abundantly clear to me this time around and echoed by everyone with whom I met was that the Afghan Government's eagerness to cooperate with us has greatly improved and that the team of Ghani and Abdullah is an improvement over any combination of Karzai and anyone else.

The current Afghan leaders are saying the right things and are undertaking efforts to root out corruption, to secure and stabilize their own country. We cannot abandon our ally. We must redouble our efforts to remain engaged to seek a more stable Afghanistan.

ISIS is growing in its presence in Afghanistan, mainly by attracting some of the more radical elements of the Taliban who have broken away and have sworn allegiance to ISIS. And that makes our strategy in Afghanistan that much more important. General Campbell told Congress that the terror group status in Afghanistan has grown from nascent to operationally emergent over the course of just a year. Yet when I led our congressional delegation to Afghanistan, I was shocked to hear that our mission does not give our commanders and troops the authority to go after ISIS, that the tasks for containing and defeating this rising threat falls squarely on the Afghan Government and its security forces.

The day the code departed from the region, we learned that seven people in Afghanistan were beheaded by ISIL, and thousands of people came out to the streets to protest this horrific act of terror. We must rethink the scope of our mission to include taking on more than just al-Qaeda and its affiliates. We should also re-assess our counternarcotics approach in Afghanistan. Terror and drugs are linked as much as the profits from the drug trade in Afghanistan fund these terror groups. While it is encouraging that the new Afghan Government has signed a new counterdrug plan, we need to ensure that it has the resources it needs to succeed in action.

I remain concerned that the number of DEA agents has decreased substantially. Our state INL staff are limited in their movements, and the Afghan counternarcotics forces cannot concentrate on the drug trade because they are busy fighting terrorism. Both the U.S. forces and the security forces of Afghanistan have a limited amount of air lift capabilities, which further limits their ability to tackle any major security or counternarcotics concern. This runs the danger of leaving a wide area of Afghanistan unexposed to our security efforts, and it could have terrible and tragic consequences.

The administration needs to revisit its strategy, and not just put a halt on the withdrawal because artificial timelines will not work, and it needs to also get buy-in from Pakistan. President Ghani has reached out his hand to Pakistan, but has been rebuffed. The U.S. cannot afford to have Pakistan play into the instability in Afghani-

stan and to continue to allow terrorists safe haven inside its borders. We currently have a pending military package for Pakistan before us in this committee. We need to use this leverage to get Pakistan to do more on the counterterrorism front and to collaborate rather than work against the Afghan Government and its security forces.

During our trip we were also honored to meet with the courageous women of Afghanistan and were proud to hear of the strides that they are making on behalf of women's rights thanks to their hard work and leadership. The stakes are too high in Afghanistan for the Afghan people, for the region, and for U.S. national security interests to allow Afghanistan to fall back on any of the progress we have made together thus far.

Lastly, I want to thank the men and women who so bravely serve and protect our national security interests in Afghanistan. We had an opportunity to meet with so many of these truly heroic and courageous individuals who continue to put their lives at risk each and every day so that we can sleep safely at home while they are out there defending our freedom and our values.

And it says say this, it says here. Say this: Congressman Deutch got pulled into a last minute meeting, but he will show up a little bit later.

So now I am going to recognize other members for their statements. And we will begin with Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thank you, Madam Chairman and Ranking Member Deutch for convening this very important hearing relating to U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. Over the previous 14 years, the U.S. has spent an estimated \$1 trillion and lost more than 2,300 American lives in Afghanistan. Military gains by the Taliban and the growing presence of groups like Daesh, as well as a growing number of loosely aligned armed groups provide grave uncertainty regarding Afghanistan's security and stability. It also reveals tremendous challenges and even uncertainty about what role we can effectively play in resolving these conflicts.

The President's recent shift in strategy will leave a significant number of American forces in Afghanistan beyond 2016, creating an unclear future regarding our presence in the region and when it will finally conclude.

I look forward to hearing the perspective of today's witnesses who will help provide an assessment of the President's strategy in Afghanistan and its impact on our overall national security. And with that I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. DeSantis.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am glad you called this hearing because I don't know what the President's strategy really is in Afghanistan. I don't know what his strategy really is to deal with terrorism in other parts of the Middle East. I haven't quite been able to figure out his overall foreign policy generally apart from making concessions to regimes that are adverse to our interests like Iran and Russia. So I am hoping to be enlightened, and I am glad you called the hearing. And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Frankel, who was actually here before Mr. Cicilline, because she welcomed you with great pomp and circumstance. I did not realize that, Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. That is all right. Mr. Cicilline can go ahead of me any time.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for this hearing. I will be short just to—as the chairlady knows, my son served in the United States Marines in Afghanistan. He also went back to Afghanistan as a member of USAID. So I have a great deal of interest in hearing what you have to say today. And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you for your family's sacrifice, Ms. Frankel.

Mr. Zeldin.

Mr. ZELDIN. Well, thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and I want to echo Ron DeSantis' point, how grateful we are that you are holding this hearing. And I think it is important for our constituents to know exactly what the President's strategy is in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and Syria. A strategy which is questioning what is the reality on the ground overseas, not so much what is the rhetoric here at home to best serve one's domestic politics.

We want to know what the rules of engagement are. Are we giving flexibility to our local commanders so that they could adapt to changing circumstances? Who exactly are the forces on the ground? Who is in charge? What is their mission? What is their skill set? What's the long-term plan? What is the vision for where we want to be a year from now or 5 years from now? Whenever we send servicemembers into harm's way, it is important for them, their families, for our country to know that they are being sent with a strategy to win to keep them safe. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Boyle of Pennsylvania.

Mr. BOYLE. Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I really am going to refrain from an opening statement except to say two things. So I guess I am not refraining from an opening statement, in typical congressional fashion.

The first is I am very anxious to hear from this august panel. I have had the opportunity to hear from one of the members before and am familiar with the work of all three of you. That is number one. And, number two, because I might not get the opportunity later to say it, absolutely anyone would be better than Hamid Karzai, who seemed to in no way appreciate the sacrifice that the American people have gone through over the last 14 years. So, if anything, we can celebrate that we actually do have somewhat of a partner in Afghanistan to move us forward. I will yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Amen. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chabot of Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for holding this hearing. And we thank our witnesses. Looking forward to hearing what they have to say this afternoon.

It seems in recent months due to the growing problems in Syria, and the Iran nuclear agreement, and ISIS and a litany of other major issues all across the world, that Afghanistan to some degree, has kind of been, I think, on the back burner of this administration, has kind of fallen from view in many ways. However, without

question the increase in terrorist attacks across the globe is a real threat to stability in the world, the future of Afghanistan, and could really undermine U.S. interests. All of us on this committee have paid particular attention of the mounting threat ISIS has posed. And I think it is fair to say that the administration fails to do due diligence to ensure stability in Afghanistan, that we are going to see a resurgence in terrorism there as well.

A thoughtful and cohesive strategy continues to be essential in preventing the expansion of al-Qaeda and ISIS and other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan. And it is my hope that the administration and our regional partners give Afghanistan the long-term strategic outlook it deserves as we move forward. And thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Chabot.

Mr. Clawson of Florida.

Mr. CLAWSON. I appreciate you all coming in today. This whole situation feels to me like the folks that we support in Afghanistan don't get along. They don't get up to speed. And our allies don't get to pay their fair share. And so while we risk the lives of our brave men and women it kind of feels like no one else, no one else, Europe, in the region, even the people we support, put chips on the table. And we are the only one getting wet. And so it kind of adds to this never-ending quagmire that we are the only ones really paying the price. And so I am hoping that you all will explain if you see a way out from that, and so I appreciate you all coming.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Clawson. And we have been joined by Mr. Weber of Texas, in case you have a off-the-cuff opening statement, we would love to hear it. You do your best work that way.

Mr. WEBER. I think most of my statements are off the cuff, Madam Chairwoman. But, no, I am ready to go. Thank you for holding this hearing.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Well, thank you. Then I am pleased to welcome our panelists. First we are pleased to welcome back Dr. Frederick Kagan who comes from a well-respected esteemed—they are a think tank, that family, all to themselves. He is the DeMuth chair and director of the Critical Threat Project at the American Enterprise Institute. Previously Dr. Kagan served as a professor of military history at the United States Military Academy at West Point, and was part of General McChrystal's strategic assessment group in Afghanistan. Welcome back.

Secondly we would like to welcome Dr. David Sedney. How should I do that?

Mr. SEDNEY. That is fine. I am only a juris doctor. So it doesn't count, my wife tells me.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Who is senior associate for the Center of Strategic International Studies. In the past he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia; Deputy Chief of Mission in the U.S. Embassy in Kabul; and senior advisor to then U.N. Ambassador John Negroponte. Welcome, sir.

And last but certainly not least, we would like to welcome Dr. Andrew Wilder who is Vice President of Asia Programs at the United States Institute of Peace. He has served as research direc-

tor for politics and policy at the Feinstein Center at Tufts University, and has managed humanitarian development programs in Afghanistan for NGOs such as Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps. Welcome, Dr. Wilder.

And we will begin with you, Dr. Kagan. Thank you. Your statements will be made a part of the record. Please feel free to summarize.

STATEMENT OF FREDERICK W. KAGAN, PH.D., CHRISTOPHER DEMUTH CHAIR AND DIRECTOR, CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you, Madam Chair. To the absent ranking, I thank him also.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If you can hold that a little bit closer.

Mr. KAGAN. I do not usually have a problem being heard. And I am very grateful for the committee for holding a hearing on this topic at this time. As Representative Chabot pointed out, Afghanistan really has fallen from the headlines. And, in fact, I have to confess that I had to rip my head out of a planning session that the Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project have been engaged on in Syria and Iraq and ISIS generally in order to try to refocus on Afghanistan.

And I will start there by saying that we need to recognize that we are facing multiple overlapping threats and conflicts. And they cannot be stove piped, and they cannot be siloed. You cannot have a strategy for defeating ISIS that does not include defeating the Wilayat's that it has established in Afghanistan, Sinai, and Libya. That it is trying to establish in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. It is a global problem. And so we have to concern ourselves with the fact that there is a small ISIS Wilayat at this point in Afghanistan.

And a lot of my testimony—a lot of my written testimony is about the long-term or midterm threats that I see emerging to the U.S. homeland from having—from allowing that organization to retain even a relatively small area of ground in Afghanistan that it can govern and in which it can radicalize Afghan youth and train them rather uncharacteristically for Afghans to be focused on attacking us here, and attacking the Europeans in Europe, which is historically not something that Afghan insurgents have mostly focused on.

But my testimony focuses on that because it is the most immediate, most significant threat to the U.S. homeland. And as we ask questions about why do we need to be in Afghanistan at all and what are our interests, I do think that it is important to begin with what is required to ensure the security and safety of the American people. And I think that we do have the problem, that that is now in the question from Afghanistan over time not at this moment, but it will be, both from ISIS and from al-Qaeda which has re-established itself, and we were just speaking before this hearing about the large al-Qaeda training camp that was attacked and destroyed in Southern Kandahar province which is—represents in its own way the complete and utter failure of a strategy that was begun in 2001 to drive al-Qaeda out and keep it from returning. Clearly that isn't accomplishing its objective at this point.

But I think it is equally important to say that if we simply oriented our fight in Afghanistan against ISIS and al-Qaeda, the groups that most imminently—or most deliberately target us here, we will fail. That fight will fail. And we will fail our larger national security interests as well. Because those groups do not pose an existential threat to the Afghan Government or the Afghan security forces which are our necessary partners. The groups that do pose an existential threat are the Taliban groups and the Haqqani network and a number of their internally focused allies.

So we face a logical conundrum, that in order to facilitate the survival of a partner, and I do salute the partnership of President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, and I do agree that almost anyone is preferable to Hamid Karzai as a so-called partner, we need to ensure that that partner can survive. And I would submit that at this point, given the rise in capability of the Taliban and Haqqani forces, and the significant decrease in the overall capability of the partnered coalition and Afghan forces, that the survival of the Afghan state is very much in question now. I am not confident that there will be an Afghanistan when the next President takes office. I see the mobilization of northern alliance forces to wage their own battle in the north as extremely problematic. I think that it runs a high risk of igniting or reigniting the ethnic civil war that rent the country in the 1990s and before that, and that created space for the Taliban to grow in the first place.

I think, in other words, that the vacuum that has been created by the withdrawal of primarily U.S. but also allied forces, drawing away from Afghan forces that have actually bled quite a lot, and I think it is very important to note that there are many, many, many, many, many more dead on the Afghan National Security Forces side than there have been on the coalition forces side, and I remember Sundays at ISF headquarters when we, the coalition, would read out the list of those coalition members who had been killed in the previous week. And the Afghan Security Force representative would simply say 50 or 60 or 70 or 100 members of the ANSF were killed. The list was, in his view, too long to read.

So we have partners who are willing to engage. We have partners who are willing to fight, and who are willing to die. And, unfortunately, we have not been giving them the support that they need and deserve, frankly, against a common threat that we need them to fight and they need our help to fight. And I sincerely hope, then, there will be some prospect for changing that strategy over time. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kagan follows:]

American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research



Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
“Assessing the President’s Strategy in Afghanistan”

**The Afghanistan Conundrum: How Should the US
Approach the Rise of Insurgent Groups?**

Frederick W. Kagan

Christopher DeMuth Chair and Director, Critical Threats Project

American Enterprise Institute

December 2, 2015

*The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the
American Enterprise Institute*

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December 2, 2015

Enemy groups are both multiplying and gaining strength in Afghanistan. The Taliban's successes in temporarily overrunning Kunduz City and regaining territory taken from it in Helmand Province in 2010 demonstrate the growing military power and boldness of that long-time foe. Continued high-profile attacks on Kabul and throughout southeastern Afghanistan show that the Haqqani Network remains a potent force. The Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) has established a new affiliate in Nangarhar, Konar, and Zabul Provinces, however, while the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has shifted its base from Pakistan into Afghanistan. Central Asian, al Qaeda-affiliated extremists such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) continue to operate freely, and some are joining with ISIS or alienated Taliban factions. Al Qaeda itself retains a limited presence not only in the distant mountainous regions of Konar and Nuristan, but also in the more strategically-important provinces of Ghazni and Zabul.¹

We can expect all of these groups to continue to gain strength and seize territory against Afghan National Security Forces that do not have the wherewithal to push back against them at current levels of American and international support. Enemy expansion will accelerate as that support is further reduced according to President Obama's most recent announcement.² The next American president will thus face multiple insurgent groups and a weakening Afghan security force, assuming that Afghanistan survives through the next US presidential election.

American leaders have long debated the magnitude of the threat enemy groups in Afghanistan pose to the US. They have generally accepted that the US can allow groups with only local objectives to persist as long as they do not threaten to overthrow the Afghan government. Debate has then continued about which groups fall into that category. The Taliban clearly does—its stated aims do not include expanding the jihad beyond Afghanistan's borders. Al Qaeda obviously has global objectives, but its footprint in Afghanistan remains small. These factors have hitherto persuaded many American policy-makers that the US can accept considerable risk in allowing the Taliban and the Haqqanis to regain some of the ground taken from them in 2010-2012 without facing the serious threat of attacks on the US homeland.

The successor to former Taliban leader Mullah Omar has not materially affected this calculus. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, who has taken his position and titles, continues to announce and pursue the same intra-Afghanistan objectives as had Mullah Omar.³ It is noteworthy that al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri declared his loyalty to Akhtar Mansour as he had to Omar, following in the tradition of Osama bin Laden's swearing of allegiance to Mullah Omar.⁴ Zawahiri's pledge should remind us that the prospect of truly separating the Taliban from al Qaeda even after the deaths of the founders of both groups remains dim, although Akhtar Mansour clearly does not intend to move the Taliban closer to al Qaeda either.

¹ The Institute for the Study of War provides continuous open-source tracking of enemy activities in Afghanistan at www.understandingwar.org. See also "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security," Report of the Secretary General, United Nations, September 1, 2015, A/70/359-S/2015/684.

² President Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," The White House Office of the Press Secretary, October 15, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/15/statement-president-afghanistan>

³ See Borhan Osman, "Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taliban," *Afghan Analysts Network*, November 24, 2015, for a good discussion of the succession within the Taliban.

⁴ "Zawahiri Pledges Allegiance to New Afghan Taliban Leader in Audio Speech," SITE Intelligence Group, August 13, 2015.

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The reshuffling of the Taliban's inner circle also clarified the relationship between the Haqqani Network and the Taliban, as Sirajuddin Haqqani, the network's leader and son of its founder, became Mansour's deputy. The Haqqanis are known to be much more closely entwined with al Qaeda, having shared bases with that group in Waziristan and Afghanistan for decades, and Sirajuddin is more radical than was his father, Jalaluddin.⁵ Yet Siraj has still retained the Afghan focus of the group and appears intent on retaking Kabul and solidifying his position in a new Taliban state rather than redirecting his efforts against the West at this time.

The emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan is thus the most immediately-concerning development that might affect Afghanistan's significance for the security of the American and European homelands, particularly in light of the recent attacks in Paris and threats in Brussels. The strength of ISIS in Afghanistan is a matter of considerable debate, and one must be careful neither to overestimate nor to underestimate it. Afghans have learned that labeling a group ISIS attracts the attention of the US as fast (or perhaps even faster than) as labeling it al Qaeda—so we must be careful not to take all the claims of ISIS presence at face value. There is ample evidence, however, including from recent journalistic forays into ISIS-held areas, that ISIS has a meaningful presence in Nangarhar Province with hundreds of fighters at its command.⁶

Most ISIS fighters attached to Wilayat Khorasan, as ISIS styles its Afghanistan territories, were likely members of the Taliban or of other local fighting groups before joining the Islamic State.⁷ They were in many cases the more radical members of those groups who chafed under the constraints imposed by a Taliban leadership concerned about alienating a population it wished to govern. ISIS prefers terror and oppression to enlisting popular sympathy, a preference that appeals to furious and unbalanced young men who wish to slash and burn all opponents. ISIS in Afghanistan has thus already demonstrated its greater brutality through the well-publicized grisly murders of Hazara civilians and opponents of its rule.

It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that ISIS members in Afghanistan are just more brutal Talibs with little meaningful connection to the ISIS narrative of global jihad. An interview with an ISIS fighter by Najibullah Quraishi, released in a recent PBS Frontline documentary, is chilling in this regard.⁸ Quraishi asked if the man had been in the Taliban before joining ISIS. He responded: "Yes, we were fighting holy war as Taliban. Our holy war was just because there was no caliphate then. But God says when there is a caliphate, you must join the caliphate. There is a caliphate now, so we've left the Taliban. We're fighting holy war under caliph's leadership." Quraishi then asked what was the aim of this holy war. The response: "We want the Islamic system all over the world, and we will fight for it." These are not the words of a Taliban leader, whose discourse would normally have been aimed at internal Afghan

⁵ See Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) for a superb and detailed history of the Haqqani Network.

⁶ Najibullah Quraishi, "ISIS in Afghanistan," PBS Frontline, November 17, 2015, available at <http://www.pbs.org/web/f/line/t/1m/isis-in-afghanistan/transcript/> (accessed December 1, 2015) offers a chilling and important insight into ISIS in Afghanistan today.

⁷ Hannah Byrne, John Krzyzaniak, Qasim Khan, "The Death of Mullah Omar and the Rise of ISIS in Afghanistan," Institute for the Study of War, August 17, 2015, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Mullah%20Omar%20Background.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2015). See also "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security," United Nations.

⁸ "ISIS in Afghanistan," PBS Frontline.

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opponents or, at most, Pakistanis. Even if the Talib in question is simply saying what his new paymasters want to hear, it is a marked departure from what most Afghans have been willing to say to receive the benefits of al Qaeda, for example. Al Qaeda never required or even expected the Taliban to support the global jihad publicly and was content to have the Taliban focus both rhetorically and militarily exclusively on Afghanistan.

The rest of the Frontline documentary is even more chilling in this regard, as it shows ISIS indoctrinating young children—a phenomenon that we have observed throughout ISIS-controlled territory, particularly in Iraq and Syria. The adult Talib may be placating ISIS, although there is no particular reason to think so, but the young children will grow up to believe ISIS's teachings and worldview if the group is allowed to control their lives for several years. The implantation of an ISIS group drumming global jihad into Afghan children at the village level poses a severe threat to the United States and Europe in the timeframe of a decade or less.

That threat is exacerbated by the growing tide of emigrants and refugees fleeing what they believe to be Afghanistan's next descent into full-scale ethnic war. Afghan refugees make up a substantial part of the overall refugee flow into Europe today, and that flow will likely increase.⁹ Iran is mobilizing Afghan Shi'a and also dragooning Afghan Sunnis into fighting on behalf of Bashar al Assad in Syria, while ISIS and al Qaeda seek to mobilize them on the other side. The fear pushing Afghans to leave their homeland again will combine with the search by the belligerents in the Middle East's sectarian war for new recruits to spread ISIS ideology in Afghanistan and then spread a partially-radicalized Afghan diaspora into the Middle East and the West. The threat of ISIS in Afghanistan is probably not imminent—it is certainly not as urgent as the threat from ISIS in Syria/Iraq, Sinai, or Libya. But it has the potential to rival those in scale and in the difficulty of resolving the underlying conflicts that create fertile ground and recruits for them.

ISIS is a direct threat to the US and Europe, as is al Qaeda. The TTP, IMU, and other groups have been driven from bases in Waziristan by a Pakistani military operation that occurred only after US forces had been withdrawn, leaving the Afghan border open to allow Islamabad's enemies, friends, and frenemies simply to move to the other side of the Durand Line.¹⁰ These groups also pursue global jihadi aims (the TTP sponsored the failed attack on Times Square in 2010, for example), and will likely pose a greater threat to the US in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan than in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Islamabad generally moderated the FATA as if it were a nuclear reactor's core, usually preventing the groups hosted there from engaging in attacks against the US that might have provoked military responses beyond what the Pakistani military was prepared to live with. No such constraints apply to terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Yet all of these groups still control very limited territory, population, and resources in Afghanistan and pose little immediate threat to the survival of the Afghan state. The Taliban and the Haqqanis, however, are becoming an existential threat to that state and,

⁹ "Germany to start sending back migrants from Afghanistan, according to reports," *The Telegraph*, October 26, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11956007/Germany-to-start-sending-back-migrants-from-Afghanistan-according-to-reports.html>.

¹⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Blood and Hope in Afghanistan: A June 2015 Update," Brookings Institution, May 26, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/05/26-isis-taliban-afghanistan-felbabbrown> (accessed 12 December 2015).

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with it, to the governance structures and security forces the US desperately needs to fight the groups that threaten us. How should the US approach this conundrum?

The US must provide the Afghan government and security forces with the resources they need to re-defeat the Taliban and the Haqqani network even while attempting to contain and ultimately defeat ISIS, the TTP, IMU, and other international jihadi groups. No prescience is required to see that Afghanistan will unquestionably go the way of Iraq if US forces are withdrawn and even, perhaps, if they remain at current inadequate levels with severely constrained authorities. We must stop logic-chopping about which enemies our forces can and cannot attack. The Taliban's lack of global ambition is irrelevant if it facilitates the overthrow of the government we need to fight ISIS.

Supporting the Afghan government requires more US troops and expanded authorities for those that are there, in addition to various non-military requirements. The US should therefore immediately reconsider its current force posture in Afghanistan and allow its forces to engage all enemy groups regardless of their relationship to ISIS or al Qaeda. The most limited force requirement simply to operate freely in the difficult terrain of Afghanistan is between 20,000 and 30,000 troops, according to assessments conducted in 2012 and 2013 whose core assumptions and conclusions remain valid.¹¹ The mid-term threat from ISIS is sufficiently clear and great to justify further engagement.

¹¹ Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, "Why U.S. Troops Must Stay in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, 23 November 23, 2012, available at <http://www.criticalthreats.org/afghanistan/kagan-why-us-troops-must-stay-afghanistan-november-23-2012> (accessed December 1, 2015). See also Frederick W. Kagan and Christopher Harmer, "Forces Required for One U.S. Base in Afghanistan after 2014," Critical Threats Project and the Institute for the Study of War, January 17, 2013, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/afghanistan/forces-required-one-us-base-afghanistan-2014-january-17-2013> (accessed December 1, 2015). Both assessments are based primarily on requirements dictated by terrain and military necessity as well as enemy situations that have, sadly, not improved in the intervening three years.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Dr. Kagan. Dr. Sedney.

**STATEMENT OF MR. DAVID. S. SEDNEY, SENIOR ASSOCIATE,
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Mr. SEDNEY. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Push that button there and hold it close to you.

Mr. SEDNEY. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you and your colleague the ranking member, Representative Deutch, for holding this hearing. Afghanistan is important. And it has the potential to be a disaster for U.S. national security if we continue along the current policies. I will make five points, and I have three recommendations. I will work hard to get it into the 5 minutes.

First, Afghanistan and its people can succeed. In my written testimony, I describe the many foundational areas, health, education, women's rights, media freedoms, and an army, and soldiers who are fighting and dying in larger numbers than ever to defend their own country. The current president and CEO are a great improvement. I very much second Representative Boyle's point, but I also point out that we are giving a better president and a better governing team less, much less, support than we ever gave President Hamid Karzai.

Second, the security situation in Afghanistan has changed significantly for the worse. What I will tell you, Madam Chair, is somewhat different than you heard in Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan is much worse than we had planned for and/or that we had prepared the Afghan military to face. The Taliban this past year mounted their largest, most violent and most successful offensive since they took over the country in the late 2000s.

Daesh, the so-called Islamic State is a growing threat in Afghanistan. Foreign radicals and Pakistani extremists who were forced out of Pakistan by a Pakistani offensive in North Waziristan have taken to fighting in Afghanistan. The battlefield is more complex, and as a result, Afghan civilian and military casualties this year will be higher than they have been before. More Afghans are being killed after American forces left than—in a combat role than when we were there. And all the indications are is that we will see a bigger, stronger, more violent and more successful Taliban offensive in 2016.

Third, the security architecture that we have in place in Afghanistan is not working. The so-called train, advise, and assist commands, TAACs, as they are called, are not doing a sufficiently good job of training, advising, or assisting. Of Afghanistan's six army corps, two are completely uncovered. The other four are only partially covered in terms of the advice and assistance they are getting. The Taliban this year captured seven district capitals, of which they retained two, captured for a short period of time Kunduz, and almost captured two other capital cities in Afghanistan's north, provincial capitals, Faisabad in Badakshan, and Maimana in Faryab province.

Those kind of advances came about despite the brave fight of Afghan forces. But it came about because they didn't have air support, because they didn't have intelligence report. They didn't have the kind of air transport that they need. They will need even more next year, and they won't have it, according to our current plans. Of course there are things the Afghans haven't don't right. With only an acting defense minister, many key jobs left unfilled for most of the year, the National Unity Government has tried hard but still has much to do. But what we haven't done is a huge contributor to this worsening security situation.

My fourth point is Afghanistan's National Unity Government which we forced down their throats is not doing the job it should. There is much better that they can do, and they need to do more. But we need to do more to help them. Our President and our Secretary of State forced two competing candidates to rule together. They are actually working hard and trying hard, but they are not doing a good enough job. We should be doing a better job of helping them.

Fifth, Pakistan's offensive in North Waziristan was the most successful counterinsurgency operation the Pakistan/Afghanistan theater has ever seen. They went in with large numbers of ground support, huge amounts of air pressure, and they cleaned out the Taliban, making Pakistan today a much safer place. However, they forced into Afghanistan hundreds of thousands of refugees and put into Afghanistan many who are now killing Afghans. We should be putting pressure on Pakistan to clean up the mess in Afghanistan that it has made because of the actions it took to make Pakistan itself safer.

My recommendations. First, we need a complete review of our policy. I very much second you on this, madam chair. The security situation is deteriorating so fast, the capabilities that we have are so limited, that if we don't this and do it quickly, disaster is possible, along with what Fred Kagan said.

Second, in the interim we need to change our rules of engagement. The rules of engagement are not clear. The rules of engagement don't allow us to do many things that are necessary. The rules of engagement don't give the Afghan forces the support they need.

And, third, we should work with Pakistan to get Pakistan to stop allowing the fighters, the weapons, the explosives to come out of Pakistan into Afghanistan. Make no mistake about it. Safe havens in Pakistan are the key to the Taliban's success. Regardless of what the Pakistanis have told us directly, all that really matters is what they do. And so far they have taken no steps, no steps at all, to stop the flow of weapons, fighters, and explosives into Afghanistan. That flow is increasing right now. The situation on the ground in Afghanistan is perilous, and unless we act, I see serious problems and a government that we should be supporting could fail. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sedney follows:]



**Statement before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**

***“ASSESSING THE PRESIDENT’S STRATEGY
IN AFGHANISTAN”***

A Testimony by:

David S. Sedney

Senior Associate (Non-resident),
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

December 2, 2015

2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing today on Afghanistan, a place where success hangs in the balance. The people of Afghanistan, neighboring countries, dangerous actors such as the Taliban, al Qaeda and Da'esh (the so-called Islamic State), and the United States and our partners and allies are making key choices now – sometimes by acting, sometimes by inaction. Those choices will frame an outcome that will directly affect our national security for decades to come.

The key for us is: will we get things right, or, to borrow (partly) a phrase from the movie “Charlie Wilson’s War” – will we mess up the end game and make things worse in the future? While our views and actions are only part of the equation and the Afghan people and the government of Pakistan are the most important actors, our actions matter and matter a lot. Sadly, based on my recent time in Afghanistan and conversations inside and outside Afghanistan, I believe our current policies are failing and making success less likely. While the Afghan people may be able to succeed despite the obstacles they face, we can and should do better. We need an immediate, intensive re-look at our policies.

Terrorism Now: Interconnected Challenges

However, before turning to Afghanistan, I want to express my sympathy and solidarity with the people and nation of France and to the victims of last month’s attacks, their families and their loved ones. France is our oldest ally and the French people share, and, in many ways, exemplify our fundamental values. When terrorists struck New York in September 2001, the outpouring of support to the United States from France was remarkable. In the days afterward, France stepped forward to work with us in many fields as we went into Afghanistan and began the difficult task that continues today, of ensuring Afghanistan is not used as a base from which to launch further attacks on the United States, on our allies, or on any country.

These attacks in Paris, where the victims (as in the 9/11 attacks here in New York) were from many countries, demonstrate how interconnected the world is and how interconnected are the security challenges that we all face. While centered in Syria and Iraq, Da’esh, the organization responsible for the attacks in Paris, is also an increasing presence in Afghanistan where its brand of violence and cruelty has attracted former Taliban and others. Many Afghans now see Da’esh in Afghanistan as a serious security threat.¹

Success in Afghanistan – Why it Matters

Success in Afghanistan is not only still possible, in my view, it is a requirement for the future security of the United States. The attacks on the United States mounted by al Qaeda from its safe haven in Afghanistan in September 2001 were made possible by a series of mistakes and misjudgments. Far from the least of these was the decision by the United States to abandon Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

¹ The Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2015: A Survey of the Afghan People*, San Francisco, 2015: p. 37, Figure 2.3. (Cited hereafter as TAF Survey)

If we repeat that mistake today, we risk paying an even greater price in the future. Today, terrorism is an increasingly dangerous global threat - with new organizations and networks emerging, more recruits joining terrorist organizations, safe havens multiplying, and terrorist attacks up sharply. The latest United States official report² shows terrorist attacks up in 2014 by over 30 percent, with deaths from terrorism up over 80 percent. The record so far in 2015, tragically, augers for another bloody year. Developments in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Mali, Somalia and elsewhere are beyond the subject of this hearing, but suffice it to say the trends are not positive, the challenges are growing, and the way ahead is far from clear.

Therefore, if, after all the blood and treasure, after all the efforts and sacrifices of the past decade and a half, Afghanistan were to return to the control of extremists, the danger from terrorism to the United States would be deadly. Those who want to attack and destroy us would gain adherents and credibility and would feel validated in their crusade against us and our values. The consequences would not just stay in Afghanistan; they would reverberate through the region and across the globe. At some point we would face the possibility of another war in Afghanistan, and that would be a much larger, bloodier conflict.

Success in Afghanistan – Why it is Still Possible

But, success in Afghanistan, despite the huge challenges and many mistakes by all involved, is still possible. In fact, in my judgment, with the right set of policies and the right kind of assistance, I believe Afghanistan and its people will succeed. I believe that Afghanistan can become the emerging positive state that the vast majority of its citizens want. I will address the challenges, mistakes and failures later in my testimony, but first the positives.

Now for many Americans, subjected to a relentless media barrage of negative reports on Afghanistan, it may come as a surprise that there is a lot of very positive news about Afghanistan. Few Americans know that our assistance has played a major role in the startling progress that Afghanistan has made and is making in areas as disparate as health and education, agriculture and media freedom. Few Americans know just how hard Afghans are now fighting and how many Afghans are now dying for their country. It is this positive record, and the commitment of the Afghan people, whom I have come to admire and respect over the past 14 years, that lead to my positive assessment.

Since 2001 Afghanistan and the Afghan people have made across the board progress in almost all areas of human development such as in health, education, and agriculture. The United Nations Development Program ranks countries on a Human Development Index. Afghanistan went from being unranked in 2001 due to lack of data and a ranking of 181 (at the bottom) for 2007,³ to a ranking of 169 (out of 187 countries) for 2013.⁴ The World Bank reports sharp improvements from 2007-2012 in a range of areas, including adult and youth literacy, electricity, sanitation, and safe drinking water.⁵ Reporters Without Borders ranks Afghanistan 122 out of

² United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*, Washington D.C., June, 2015.

³ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report*, New York October, 2009

⁴ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report*, New York, July, 2014

⁵ The World Bank, *Afghanistan Development Update*, Washington D.C., October 2015; chart, p. 18.

180 countries in press freedom,⁶ up from 134 out of 166 countries in 2003.⁷ And in 2014 Afghans turned out in numbers that surprised analysts everywhere for elections that allowed for a peaceful transition of civilian rule, a landmark for any country. This kind of progress in a country wracked by a violent insurgency, beset by narcotics networks, and in a region where authoritarianism, extremism, and oppression are rife is truly remarkable.

Even more remarkable is that over the past two years Afghanistan has survived two years of wrenching transitions - a security transition from over 100,000 international forces fighting the Taliban insurgency down to 13,600 international troops in support roles in 2015; a political transition from President Karzi to a National Unity Government headed by President Asrghar Ghani; and an economic transition from an economy spurred by spending by international forces and massive international assistance to an economy that, while still depending on outside assistance, is increasingly internally focused. These transitions have been difficult. Afghan security forces have fought hard and well against an increasing Taliban threat, but have struggled to maintain the gains achieved by international forces when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was in the lead for much of the fighting. Afghan elections were marred by controversy and fraud and a new government was only cobbled together after strong pressure from the United States. That new government has struggled at times, but has made a promising start in a range of areas (below). And the Afghan economy, which many feared might plunge into a recession as international forces withdrew, is growing, albeit at too-sluggish rate of 1.3%.⁸

In President Ghani the Afghan people have a new leader, committed to reform, and the United States and our international partners in the new NATO "Resolute Support" (RS) mission have a new and positive partner. As he proved during his visit to Washington this past spring, President Ghani appreciates the contributions and sacrifices the American people, particularly our troops, have made over the past 14 years and he looks forward to a day when Afghanistan is at peace and is able to support and defend itself.

I will mention just a few of the most important areas where the new government has made progress:

- Resetting Afghanistan-U.S. relations, including signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement with the U.S.
- Institution of systemic financial management reforms, focused on rooting out corruption and increasing domestic revenues.
 - Domestic revenues are up by 8% over 2105, despite the slowdown in economic growth. The World Bank attributes this to better administration by the new government⁹.
 - Banking reforms including accelerated efforts to recover Kabul Bank funds and stabilize the banking sector. (Note: this includes the cancelling by President Ghani of a controversial deal, brokered by members of his administration, with one of

⁶ Reporters Without Borders, *2015 World Press Freedom Index*, <https://index.rsf.org/>

⁷ Reporters Without Borders, *2003 World Press Freedom Index*, <https://index.rsf.org/>

⁸ World Bank, op. cit.

⁹ World Bank, op. cit.

the convicted Kabul Bank fraudsters. This is an example of how difficult fighting corruption is in Afghanistan.)

- Establishment of a Procurement Commission to review all public contracts, in the past a major source of corruption. Accomplishments include uncovering military fuel corruption and savings estimated by the Afghan government to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a Staff Monitored Program, a first step towards an IMF Extended Credit Facility for Afghanistan.¹⁰
- Major jobs/employment program announced, targeted at youth unemployment.
- Urban land registration program launched to combat land corruption and restore land rights to disenfranchised.
- Other economic development programs launched, such as \$300 million New Roads program.
- A number of new, young, reform-oriented ministers appointed to key ministries, such as agriculture.

Security – the Greatest Challenge

However, despite all the progress made over the past 14 years and the positive signs on reform from the new government, Afghanistan is still a fragile state facing huge challenges. Security is by far the biggest challenge, and one that has morphed well beyond what United States and other analysts predicted just a few years ago. A recent survey by The Asia Foundation (TAF) found that only 36% of Afghans, down from 55% a year ago, believed their country was headed in the right direction¹¹. The major reason for this change was a decline in the security situation. The TAF survey found concerns about security at their highest levels since 2007¹².

This survey of Afghans tracks with reports from a variety of sources, including the United Nations^{13,14} and the United States Department of Defense¹⁵ that security in Afghanistan is under threat, with Afghan forces, at best, holding their own. During a recent visit to Afghanistan in September and October, I met with a range of Afghans, from students and business people to military and political leaders. More of them reported concerns about their own and their families' safety than at any time since I was first posted to Afghanistan in 2002 or in any of my multiple times in the country since.

¹⁰ International Monetary Fund, *IMF Managing Director Approves a Staff-Monitored Program for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Press Release No. 15/247 June 2, 2015

¹¹ TAF Survey, op. cit. pp. 5, 15-21

¹² TAF Survey, op. cit. pp. 6, 7, 33-52

¹³ Rod Norland and Joseph Goldstein, *Afghan Taliban's Reach Is Widest Since 2001, U.N. Says*, New York Times, October 11, 2015.

¹⁴ United Nations, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. Report of the Secretary-General*, New York, September 1, 2015

¹⁵ United States Department of Defense, *Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Washington, DC, June 2015 (hereafter cited as "1225 Report")

This decline in security is having a number of unforeseen consequences. A major one is a surge of Afghans fleeing the renewed violence and joining Syrians and others seeking refuge in Europe. The International Organization for Migration estimates that about 20% of the refugees striving to reach Europe now are from Afghanistan. If security trends continue as they have, this year's numbers will move from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands. Such a surge would put huge pressures on our European allies as well as on neighboring countries, which are now trying to repatriate to Afghanistan refugees from earlier conflicts.

A New, Improved Taliban

On the ground, the Taliban offensive in 2015, code-named "Azam" (perseverance) was the broadest ranging and most successful military campaign that the Taliban have waged since they took over the country in the late 1990s. The offensive covered more of Afghanistan than ever before, reaching areas in the north previously thought to be out of the Taliban's reach. During the offensive the Taliban took control of 7 district centers and, in October, one provincial capital, Kunduz. Also in October they nearly took two other provincial capitals, Faisabad in Badakshan and Maimana in Faryab province. The Taliban also mounted serious challenges to Afghan government control of Ghazni and Helmand provinces. While Afghan forces defended or retook most of these places, the UN reports that the Taliban remains in control of two district centers as of the end of September¹⁶.

The Taliban conducted multiple, major show of force attacks on Kabul. Significant attacks included on "...the National Assembly on 22 June, attacks on international military convoys in Kabul on 30 June, 7 July and 22 August, and following the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar, a string of attacks between 7 and 10 August, including suicide attacks in the vicinity of an Afghan National Army base, the police academy, an international military base and Kabul International Airport, resulting in over 55 individuals killed and over 330 injured"¹⁷. The Taliban carried out "attacks on Afghan military and Government targets in the provincial capitals of Kandahar (25 May), Jalalabad (31 May), Lashkar Gah (30 June) and Khost (12 July)"¹⁸. (Note: The attacks in Kabul and Khost, to me, bore all the signatures of the Haqqani Network, a Taliban group resident in Pakistan and with long-standing ties to Pakistan's intelligence services.)

These attacks will likely have succeeded in killing and wounding more Afghan civilians and Afghan security forces than in any year in the past fourteen. It is an obvious irony that an insurgent movement that spent years messaging that its objective was to kill foreign forces, that the vast majority of the Taliban's victims have always been Afghans and the majority of those victims are civilians. Despite Taliban claims of a code of conduct that strives to minimize violence against civilians, Taliban actions have regularly been to the contrary. And in a war where the Taliban have blamed international interventions for the death and destruction in their country, in fact, as international forces have withdrawn and pulled out of combat, violence by the Taliban has gone up. What does this achieve? Here is where the Taliban's strategy tracks that of many insurgents elsewhere – undermining confidence in the target government. This year they

¹⁶ United Nations, op. cit. para. 16.

¹⁷ *ibid.* para. 18

¹⁸ *ibid.* para. 18

have succeeded, as the TAF Survey shows. They are getting the message to the Afghan people that their government and security forces do not yet have the capability to protect the Afghan people. In this situation, Afghanistan needs more, not less, help.

But, beyond the increased breadth and intensity of the Taliban attacks, perhaps most worrying for the 2016 fighting season is an evolution in the tactics, techniques, and procedures used by the Taliban forces. As described to me by multiple sources, the Taliban for the first time in over a decade began using massed forces – beginning with scores of fighters, then hundreds in some of their operations. The Taliban offensives included use of Uzbek and other foreign fighters as “shock troops,” the Taliban version of Special Forces, a technique they used in their offensives of the late 1990s, but had rarely employed in recent years. These foreign forces were key to the October battle for Kunduz.

The Taliban also seemed better armed and better financed than in the past, according to many of those I spoke with. The large amounts of weapons and explosives used by the Taliban throughout Afghanistan showed they had the financing and logistics infrastructure to move this military equipment from their depots and supply chains in Pakistan to wherever such supplies were needed in Afghanistan. Beyond equipment from Pakistani sources, fighters from Pakistan – in most cases ethnic Pashtuns educated in jihad in extremist mosques in areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan – were widely used in some of the Taliban offensives. While some of these fighters are from Afghan families that fled Afghanistan in past decades, they generally were born and raised in Pakistan and often made their first trip to Afghanistan in order to fight or to carry out suicide attacks.

The Taliban Prepare for 2016

Much of the Taliban offensive in 2015 seemed probing in nature. This is consistent with the name the Taliban bestowed on the effort and with the situation on the ground. This was the first fighting season where ISAF forces were not present in combat and was a test of what the U.S. administration meant when it proclaimed the war in Afghanistan was “over,” and had been “brought to a “responsible conclusion.” The Taliban appeared to be constantly testing Afghan forces to see under what circumstances they would receive air or other support and to determine how effective the Afghan forces would be without American advisors present on the battlefield. As the summer progressed, the Taliban kept upping the ante, seeing if they could use massed forces and getting closer to the kind of semi-conventional battles that the Taliban fought when they conquered Afghanistan in the 1990s and during the mid-2000s when they began their comeback against an under-resourced Coalition, but later discontinued when their casualties from Coalition air power became too great.

While it is too early to understand all the conclusions the Taliban may have drawn from this year's fighting, it does seem clear from Taliban messages to their fighters, from speaking to those who have spoken with, or have direct knowledge of the Taliban's views, that the Taliban are positive and optimistic. They see the 2015 fighting season as a success and expect much greater success next fighting season.

Based on their experience this year they likely believe that they will only face rare cases of U.S. or coalition air power or other assets being used against them. They will have found the limits on Afghan forces' mobility – how quickly the Afghans can (or cannot) move reinforcements or supplies to threatened areas. They will have discovered that Afghan intelligence is currently only "...manned, organized, trained and equipped to perform all basic intelligence functions at a rudimentary level."¹⁹

And while the Afghan forces prevailed in virtually every battle they fought with the Taliban this past year, the lack of mobility on the part of Afghan forces makes them vulnerable to a maneuverable insurgent force. The lack of Afghan firepower, with little effective artillery and minimal indigenous close air support, makes it more likely that the Taliban will begin using massed forces to overpower outnumbered Afghan soldiers. This is not because the Afghan forces are not good fighters, or that there are too few Afghan forces. It is a simple fact of insurgent/guerilla warfare that the insurgents have the ability to choose the battlefield. Without the key enablers— air support, artillery, and intelligence – that we have discontinued providing. The Afghans, as a defending force, pinned down guarding cities, towns, villages, key infrastructure, and lines of communication, are at a disadvantage.

And the Afghan forces will be at this disadvantage facing a well-armed, well-financed Taliban that will, as it has for the past 14 years, have spent the winter refitting in Pakistan, holding senior level planning meetings there, and coming up with their strategy and campaign plan for 2016. When that new campaign plan is announced, typically in the spring, my fear is that rather than a status quo title and goal, like this year's "Perseverance," the Taliban's next offensive will reflect their success of the past year and aim to take over parts of Afghanistan. That will be hard to do, as the Afghan forces remain capable and motivated. I do not believe the Taliban will succeed in 2016. But, in the absence of needed enablers and with U.S. forces restricted from providing effective enabler assistance the Taliban's ability to, at a minimum, kill more Afghan civilians and security forces will be greater next year than this year.

A New Security Challenge: Da'esh (the Islamic State)

While IS, ISIS, ISIL, Da'esh, call it what you will, operates its terror networks from territory it has conquered in Syria and Iraq, the organization is an offshoot of al Qaeda, the same al Qaeda that carried out the attacks in New York and which we drove out of Afghanistan, into Pakistan, in 2001. Da'esh sprang from that same al Qaeda, an organization whose top leaders we have killed often, but which continues to operate in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and other places. And Da'esh, like al Qaeda, has an ideology that is antithetical to our values and to our existence.

Now that Da'esh has emerged from al Qaeda it has become a competitor with its parent for fighters, for money, and most of all a competitor for ideological leadership of extremists and radicals who want to force a warped version of Islam on the vast majority of Muslims who reject the extremists' horrific visions. In this competition, terror attacks are used not just to try and strike at western countries that reject the abusive Da'esh ideology and actions, but also as

¹⁹ 1225 Report, op. cit., p. 58.

recruiting tools and as ways to “prove” the validity of these groups’ universalist claims to religious and political authority.

This competition of ideologies is playing out in words and actions. The leaders of each group have stated that the other lacks legitimacy and called on all Muslims to reject the other group. They are competing for the adherence of existing groups, such as the Taliban, and seeking recruits from the same pools of dissatisfied youth in Afghanistan, as elsewhere.

Da’esh has had success in recruiting former Taliban, disappointed in the current Taliban leadership’s failure to re-conquer the country and in the venality of some Taliban leaders. Da’esh adherents have seized Afghan towns and villages; displaying the Da’esh flag and imposing the same extremist strictures on the people as exist in Syria and Iraq. Those who have fallen under Da’esh have in many cases fled, seeking refuge in cities and appealing to their government for assistance. The Taliban have responded by sending in forces to try and retake areas from Da’esh, killing both opponents and civilians in what are on-going, violent clashes. It is impossible to predict whether Da’esh will gain a true foothold in Afghanistan and whether it can out-compete the Taliban and their still active al Qaeda allies. But the presence of Da’esh has resulted in even more bloodshed, particularly against Hazara Shi’as, hated by both the Da’esh and the Taliban. The interplay between these two groups adds a new element to an already dangerous battlefield, complicating the tasks of the Afghan security forces.

Where We Have Failed

As someone who was present in Kabul in May 2002 when the first U.S. Special Forces arrived to begin training a minimal Afghan National Army and who, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia from 2009 -2013, had some responsibility for policies regarding the development of the Afghan forces, I have seen both failures and successes. As we worked to fulfill our January 2002 pledge to build an effective Afghan National Army, capable of defending its own country, and ensuring that Afghanistan was never again a base for terrorist attacks against others, I watched as our military in 2002 tried to refinish beat-up Kalashnikovs for the new Afghan soldiers to use because Washington bureaucrats thought all guns were created equal and believed that the Afghans would never need real ones. I urged (unsuccessfully) against setting our target for an Afghan Army of 50,000 with no advanced capabilities, in order to save money for our invasion of Iraq. This was a force that Afghan soldiers knew, and told us, would never be sufficient to hold the country against a resurgent Taliban or any other enemy. They were right.

We started off too small and too light, spent years playing catch up, with the Taliban always a couple of steps ahead until we finally started getting it right in 2009. President Obama’s early decisions on Afghanistan got the part about building Afghan forces right for the first time. We did a serious analysis of how large and how capable a force Afghanistan would need to defend itself from an insurgency abetted by terrorists. We put in place the right kind of training force, quickly moving to a train-the-trainer approach that effectively produced good soldiers. These were Afghan soldiers, capable of fighting on the small-unit level the conflict then demanded. And we provided them with needed enablers – air, intelligence, and logistics. We equipped the forces well and began training on higher-level institutional skills, operations at

the corps and above levels, strategy and analysis, leadership, and national level coordination of operations.

The Enabler Gap

But, because we had a tight timeline from Washington – our surge forces could only stay in place for, in some cases, less than a year, we prioritized what was needed most immediately and put off the tougher, more time-intensive and more expensive building of enablers. As mentioned above the key enablers absolutely essential to a capable military response to an insurgency in today's world are, air power – both transport and close air support; intelligence, especially the force multiplier of modern technical intelligence – drones and aerostats; and logistics. Additionally, building the higher-order military capabilities mentioned above, particularly leadership and corps and above-level operations and coordination, are skill sets that take years to inculcate.

However, our planning assumptions in the 2009-2012 timeframe were that even as U.S. troops drew down, we would be able to provide necessary enablers and continue training, advising, and assisting until the Afghans developed necessary capabilities themselves – a process for which there is no set timetable or yardstick. When in 2012 the White House decided that there would be no U.S. enablers made available to Afghan forces after 2014 and started debating a possible pullout of all our forces from Afghanistan in the same year, our assumptions were reversed. As a participant and observer in the debates inside the administration during 2012-2013, I saw the struggles to come up with ways forward that would either minimize the enabler gaps or to devise quick, cheap ways to provide complicated, expensive systems. I have huge admiration for my colleagues at the Pentagon, CENTCOM, US Forces Afghanistan and elsewhere who tried many different paths as they struggled to square the conflicting orders to leave Afghanistan in a “responsible” manner and not to provide enablers to Afghan forces after 2014. Sadly, I have to report that these efforts have not worked and that the absence of enablers and the dearth of effective, trained advisors in the right places in Afghanistan is putting success in Afghanistan at unnecessary risk.

Specifically, the Afghan Air Force we are now developing relies on a mixture of old and/or less than fully capable aircraft many of which will not come on line for 1-2 years. The Afghan government has been seeking support for its air force from other countries, including Russia and India, but so far with limited success. It does not appear likely that the Afghans will have anything close to the air power they need for 2016.

Afghan intelligence needs the technical capabilities from the advanced drones and aerostats which the U.S. and Coalition allies deployed to Afghanistan through 2014. Many of these capabilities have either been moved back to the U.S. or deployed to Syria and Iraq. However, the U.S. has the capability to reintroduce quickly much of the departed technical assets and the intelligence personnel and analysts that operate them. These key enablers should only be removed when the battlefield situation is such that their departure does not substantially increase risk.

As for logistics assistance, that is an area where I do not possess the expertise and have not had the kind of interaction with Afghans necessary to determine what kinds of assistance is going to be needed beyond our current timelines. This is an area that deserves closer examination by experts.

Another area that deserves serious study is the provision of the higher-level operational advisors at the corps and above level that the Afghan military continues to need. The U.S. Army has disbanded the units that it once had to train such advisors. At the current time, our advisors get minimal training on their tasks and often rotate out too quickly to have the kind of positive impact that they should have. Similarly, our Italian and German colleague who staff the Train, Advise, and Assist Commands (TAACs) in Herat in western Afghanistan and Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, do not have the training they need.

Recommendations

As I explained above, there is much that is going well in Afghanistan. My view is that success, although a hard task is a task that we can and should achieve. But to reduce the risk to that success to a manageable level, we need to review our current strategy, particularly with an eye to changing our rules on enablers and our rules of engagement.

We do not need to send large numbers of new forces to Afghanistan. But, we do need the flexibility to respond when the Taliban, or Da'esh, or Al Qaeda, threatens the Afghans with capabilities for which we did not prepare the Afghan forces.

Rather than a time-driven schedule, blind to events on the ground, and in order to protect our national security and to keep our commitment to support Afghanistan, we need to come up with a set of benchmark achievements by which we will measure the success of our plans. If circumstances change, or we fail, we should be ready to adjust the strategy, and, if necessary, adjust the capabilities and forces we deploy.

Only if we are flexible and adjust our policies to reflect changed realities on the ground can we show the world that we are reliable, trustworthy partners who are willing to take the actions necessary to prevent catastrophes like another 9/11, or worse, from happening.

Quotes

“We know the costs of walking away.”

“So I say to you today: As Afghanistan sees women standing up in Afghanistan to take control of their country’s future – not only for themselves, but for all Afghans – we have to be determined that they will not stand alone. **America will stand up with them** as they shape a strong and united Afghanistan that secures the rightful place in the community of nations.” (Emphasis added)

John Kerry

Secretary of State

Georgetown University

Washington, DC

November 15, 2013

“...we have very real--and very recent--history that shows just what can happen in this part of the world when extremists have breathing space, safe havens, and governments complicit with and supportive of their mission. Less than 5 years after the last Soviet tank crossed the Termez Bridge out of Afghanistan, Islamic militants launched their first attack on the World Trade Center in New York. **We cannot afford to make a similar mistake again.**”

Robert Gates

Secretary of Defense

Testimony to Committee in Armed Services, United States Senate

December 2, 2009

"Consider the long-term price we have paid as a result of disengaging from Afghanistan after 1989. As Secretary of Defense Bob Gates told the Senate Armed Services Committee just yesterday, **we cannot afford to make that mistake again.**"

Hilary Clinton

Secretary of State

Asia Society speech

February 18, 2011

"I told the President that you can count on the United States -- just like you've been able to count on this administration, you'll be able to count on the next administration, as well. It's in our interest that Afghanistan's democracy flourish. **It's in America's interest that we forever deny safe haven to people who still want to kill our citizens.**"

President George W. Bush

Remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan

December 15, 2008

"The question that has been raised in the course of my visit this morning is, **"Will the United States be here for the long term?"** **The answer is yes. We are committed to this.** The American people are committed, Congress is committed, and above all President Bush is as committed as he has been since the very first day we started and you can be sure of that. The United States will be making another substantial pledge at the Berlin conference and we look forward to seeing you there. You will be leading the conference and we look forward to working with you and your authorities in building up of the Afghan National Army, the building up of your police force, the building up of your political institutions. And doing everything possible so that the Afghan people know the international community stands firmly with them and that the United States of America stands firmly with the Afghan people as they move forward.

Colin Powell

Secretary of State

Remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan**March 17, 2004**

The commitment of the United States is a strong commitment but also one that will be an enduring commitment. I have said before that **we made the mistake once before of leaving Afghanistan** and of not sustaining our commitment to our relationship here. We will not make that mistake again. America will be committed and a friend of the Afghan people for a very, very long time to come.”

Condoleezza Rice**Secretary of State****Remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan****June 28, 2006**

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Yikes. It is getting worse.
Dr. Wilder, any good news there?

**STATEMENT OF ANDREW WILDER, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT,
ASIA PROGRAMS, UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE**

Mr. WILDER. I will try. But anyway, Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch, when he joins us, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to give my views on the current U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. I would like to note that the views I give today are my own, as the U.S. Institute of Peace does not take policy positions.

I am currently the vice president of USIP's Asia Center where my responsibilities include overseeing our work in Afghanistan. I began to work in this region 30 years ago with U.S. humanitarian organizations and witnessed firsthand the tragic consequences for Afghans, and eventually the U.S. as well, when peace settlements failed and when the world lost interest in Afghanistan.

My main message today, therefore, is that the U.S. should not once again prematurely disengage from Afghanistan. In my view, the foremost interest of the U.S. in Afghanistan should be to help ensure that it remains relatively peaceful and stable, and does not slide back into all-out civil war and anarchy, precisely the same conditions that gave birth to the Taliban in the 1990s, and gave al-Qaeda sanctuary.

The collapse of the Afghan state would nearly certainly result in Afghanistan once again becoming a safe haven for transnational terrorist groups, and would at risk destabilizing its neighbors, including nuclear armed Pakistan. In this regard, I welcome President Obama's recent announcement that the U.S. will maintain the current level of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of next year. Perhaps more importantly, President Obama reversed his earlier plan to close down U.S. bases in Afghanistan, and instead to maintain beyond 2016 at least, 5,500 troops in bases in Bagram, Kandahar, and Jalalabad.

Significantly, for the first time since May 2014, the U.S. no longer has a calendar deadline by which to pull out U.S. forces. This not only serves to keep options open for the next President, but it also sends a strong message to the Afghan people as well as the Taliban of the U.S. commitment to achieve our objective of a stable Afghanistan.

I suspected my two colleagues would focus mostly on the security situation, and so I thought I would in my oral testimony touch on the economic and political situation as well. I think the security situation is often the focus of attention, but the current economic crisis in Pakistan—in Afghanistan is one of the most serious threats to the stability of the current government and the constitutional order in Afghanistan.

The Afghan economy is in dire straits. Economic growth has been very weak. A 1.3 percent in 2014 when in the decade before we are achieving rates of 8 to 9 percent on average. It has been frequently noted but worth repeating that it was not the withdrawal of Soviet troops that led to the downfall of the Najibullah regime in 1992, and the resulting descent into a bloody civil war. But the end to the Soviet subsidies following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In

order not to make the same mistake, I would make the following two recommendations in terms of economic assistance.

First, the U.S. should play a strong leadership role at the International Donor Conference on Afghanistan, taking place in Brussels next October, to ensure that major donor countries renew their commitments to maintaining robust levels of civilian assistance to Afghanistan and so that it isn't just the U.S. having to foot that bill.

And, second, the U.S. and other donors should provide the Afghan Government with more flexible financial resources that can be used to help stimulate the economy and create jobs in the short to medium term. This would help reduce the possibility of civil unrest due to economic discontent, and buy the Ghani administration some political space to get a reform agenda and a peace process on track. And if anyone is interested, I have copies with me today of a USIP paper by our expert, Bill Byrd, on reviving Afghanistan's economy, which goes into more detail.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Would you like that to be entered into the record, sir?

Mr. WILDER. Yes, please.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. WILDER. And my written comments also have more details.

And then lastly, on the political situation, while the U.S. and other friends of Afghanistan need to continue to support the Afghan Government through security and economic assistance programs, the effectiveness of this support will be seriously undermined if the National Unity Government does not live up to its responsibilities to overcome political divisions and govern more effectively.

Afghanistan's National Unity Government was created to resolve the political crisis that developed following the disputed 2014 Presidential elections. It was built for political inclusiveness among contending elite groups, not for effectiveness. As a result, its main achievement so far has been not to fall apart. This in itself is not an insignificant achievement given the major security and economic challenges the country is confronting and given that several other countries in the region are falling apart, but it is not enough. Afghanistan's National Unity Government must begin to act more like a unified government of a country facing a national crisis rather than a government endlessly litigating the past election and bickering over government positions.

The price of just hanging together has been a great loss of legitimacy among the Afghan public. The government has been extremely slow to complete such basic tasks as filling key government positions, let alone the far more complex tasks that are required to address Afghanistan's simultaneously deepening economic, security, and governance crises.

To conclude, I believe that a long-term U.S. commitment to remain actively engaged in Afghanistan is the best way to achieve our national security interests of ensuring a relatively stable Afghanistan in this troubled region of the world. In my written testimony, I recommend ways this can be done and outline some of the obstacles and opportunities for an inclusive peace process in Afghanistan.

There will be no better way to help redeem the commitments of blood and treasure that have been made since 2001 by the United States, our allies, and the Afghan people than by remaining engaged and working together to achieve the objective of peace in Afghanistan. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wilder follows:]



United States Institute of Peace

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to promote peaceful resolution to international conflicts
...

“Assessing the President’s Strategy in Afghanistan”

**Testimony before the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa**

**Andrew Wilder
Vice President, Asia Center
United States Institute of Peace**

December 2, 2015

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to appear before you today to present my views on the current U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. Thank you for this opportunity. The views I express today are my own and not necessarily those of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), which does not take policy positions.

Introduction

I am a Vice President at the U.S. Institute of Peace where I am responsible for managing the Institute's Asia programs, including Afghanistan which is our largest country program in the world today. My testimony today is informed by the thirty years I have spent working in and on Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the 1990s, as a humanitarian aid worker I saw first-hand the tragic and devastating consequences for Afghans – and eventually the U.S. as well – when the international community lost interest in Afghanistan. My main message today, therefore, is that the U.S. should not once again prematurely disengage from Afghanistan. In my view this would almost inevitably push Afghanistan back into full-fledged civil war and anarchy – precisely the same conditions that gave birth to the Taliban in the 1990s, and gave Al Qaeda a sanctuary. But neither can we ignore what we have learned from our past decade of involvement in Afghanistan. In my testimony I will outline what I believe need to be the key elements of a sustained, effective, and informed engagement.

While much of the news emanating from Afghanistan is negative, and the economic, political and security challenges confronting the Afghan government are sobering, it is also important to remember that much has been achieved during the past 14 years. Not in my wildest dreams working as the Save the Children director in Afghanistan under Taliban control in the late 1990s could I have imagined the tremendous gains that would be made over the next 10-15 years in terms of health and education indicators, human rights, economic and political advances for women, the strong role of civil society organizations, the communications revolution and free media, transportation infrastructure, and so much more. Certainly many mistakes were made, and in too many cases achievements fell short of expectations, but it is tremendously important that we protect and build on the very real gains made to date. It is also important to remember that much of this progress was made possible by the brave efforts of our military and civilian personnel who have served in Afghanistan, as well as by generous U.S. financial assistance.

I would like to take this opportunity to note that while many organizations are phasing down or closing their Afghanistan operations, USIP sees this as a critical time in determining whether Afghanistan has a future that is peaceful or conflict-ridden. We are therefore expanding our programs to identify innovative ways to prevent, mitigate and resolve violent conflict. Our team based in Kabul, supported by colleagues in our headquarters in Washington, D.C., implements programs designed to improve understanding of conflict dynamics and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms, strengthen and support the important work of civil society organizations and the Afghan government to prevent and resolve conflict and promote the rule of law, and advance conflict resolution and peace education in schools, universities and communities. We work closely with colleagues at the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Defense and our NATO allies, and through our research and programs help to inform their work and the work of other organizations and policymakers. USIP also frequently convenes and facilitates dialogues with key actors from across the Afghan political spectrum, and organizes events here in the U.S. to help inform policymakers, practitioners and the public about key issues confronting Afghanistan.

U.S. National Security Interests in Afghanistan

In order to assess the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan it is important first to be clear what the overall U.S. national security interest is that the strategy is intended to promote. In my view, the foremost interest of the U.S. in Afghanistan should be to help ensure a relatively stable Afghanistan that does not slide back into civil war and anarchy, because this would nearly certainly result in Afghanistan once again becoming a safe haven for transnational terrorist groups, and would also risk destabilizing its neighbors (especially nuclear armed Pakistan). This objective is shared by the vast majority of Afghans who have been the main victims of instability, corrupt and predatory governments, and extremist violence. It is also shared by President Ghani's government, which while politically much weaker than its predecessor, is much more committed than President Karzai and his government to a strong partnership with the U.S. And finally, this goal is shared by our allies in NATO and beyond. The objective of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan has been thwarted by the Taliban, Afghanistan's neighbors (most notably Pakistan), and powerful Afghan political elites who have undermined the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law and weakened and delegitimized state institutions through pervasive corruption and other forms of predatory behavior. Unfortunately, uncertainty about the extent to which the U.S. was committed to remaining engaged in Afghanistan has been another factor fueling instability by exacerbating hedging strategies among Afghans and their neighbors.

In this regard, although I wish the decision had come much earlier, I welcome President Obama's recent announcement that the U.S. would maintain the current level of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of next year to pursue the two main tasks of training the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and supporting counterterrorism operations. Perhaps more importantly, President Obama also reversed his earlier plan to close down bases in Afghanistan, and instead to maintain beyond 2016 at least 5,500 troops at bases in Bagram, Jalalabad and Kandahar. Significantly, for the first time since May 2014, the U.S. no longer has a calendar deadline by which to pull out U.S. forces. This not only serves to keep options open for the next U.S. president to then increase or decrease troop levels based on conditions on the ground, but it is also a strong message to the Afghan people, as well as the Taliban, of the U.S. commitment to achieve its objective of a stable Afghanistan. President Obama, in his October 15 statement announcing the change in his troop withdrawal policy, emphasized the commitment of the U.S. to a stable and united Afghanistan:

To the Afghan people, who have suffered so much -- Americans' commitment to you and to a secure, stable and unified Afghanistan, that remains firm. Our two nations have forged a strategic partnership for the long term. And as you defend and build your country, today is a reminder that the United States keeps our commitments.

The Afghan Government's Capacity to Govern and Secure the Country

I have been asked today to testify on the Afghan government's capacity to govern and secure the country, as well as the current status of the Taliban. I will briefly outline what I believe are the toxic mix of political, security and economic challenges confronting the Afghan government, and then touch on prospects for an inclusive peace process with the Taliban. I'll conclude with some recommendations on measures that could help the U.S. achieve our objective of a relatively peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

Political Divisions

The past year was supposed to have demonstrated that Afghanistan's political, economic, and security institutions were now sufficiently strong to justify the near-complete withdrawal of all US forces in 2016,

as announced by President Obama in May of last year. Only several weeks after this announcement, however, the Afghan presidential election of 2014 degenerated into an acrimonious dispute over allegations of fraud, and behind this dispute were implicit and explicit threats of violence. To repair this situation, Secretary Kerry negotiated a power-sharing government with the two electoral contestants, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. A “National Unity Government” was formed with Ghani as the president and Abdullah as the “Chief Executive Officer”—a position that does not exist in the Afghan constitution but whose powers were enumerated in the political agreement—with “equitable” division of cabinet positions between the two camps. Both sides also agreed that this unusual arrangement would be normalized through a constitutional convention that would be held in two years (i.e., by September 2016). They also agreed that prior to that, electoral reforms would take place to ensure that the delegates to that convention would be elected not only according to the law, but according to a far higher standard of electoral practice to ensure that the fraud alleged in the 2014 election would not take place again.

The National Unity Government was therefore born in crisis. But it has unfortunately never transcended the circumstances of its birth. It was built for political inclusiveness among contending elite groups, not for effectiveness. As a result, its main achievement so far has been to not fall apart. But the price of hanging together has been a great loss of legitimacy among the Afghan public as the government has been extremely slow to complete such basic tasks as forming a cabinet, or filling other key government positions, let alone the far more complex tasks that are required to address Afghanistan’s simultaneously deepening economic, security, and governance crises. In other words, a new government weakened by the post-election National Unity Government agreement has inherited a conflict that has become more volatile and complex than expected. The resulting situation has been sobering.

On November 19, the United States Institute of Peace hosted The Asia Foundation to present the results of its annual survey of the Afghan people. The results, which are available on the Foundation’s website, show a significant drop in confidence regarding Afghanistan’s future. When asked if their country was moving in the right direction, only 36.7% responded positively, down sharply from the 54.7% who responded positively the previous year. Part of this pessimism is caused by the deteriorating security situation and the sharp economic downturn and resulting lack of jobs, which was largely the result of the rapid drawdown of the international military presence and associated large reductions in spending. A very tangible example of this loss of confidence is the sharp increase in the number of Afghans who are trying to escape Afghanistan, and according to UNHCR now comprise the second largest percentage after Syrians of refugees arriving in Europe.

Resolving the political crisis and increasing confidence in the government is first and foremost the responsibility of Afghanistan’s leaders and political elites who have, to date, demonstrated insufficient political will to resolve differences and govern effectively. Afghanistan’s National Unity Government must begin to act more like the unified government of a country facing a national crisis, rather than a government endlessly litigating the past election and bickering over government positions. It has proven incredibly difficult to convince Afghanistan’s political class to act in Afghanistan’s national interests. The problem here is not only between Ghani and Abdullah and their teams, but a number of national and regional powerbrokers who have, in their short-term and often irresponsible actions, created space for the Taliban to expand. The temporary fall of the northern city of Kunduz to Taliban forces in September should have been a clear wake-up call to Afghan leaders that the crisis they are facing is real and requires concerted and united policies.

For the US administration, and other members of the international community supporting the Afghan government, it has been difficult to find the right balance between supporting the government while at the same time wanting to withdraw the vast majority of international forces. The sharp reduction in troop levels has clearly contributed to the deteriorating security situation. However, there is also a need to prevent a situation of moral hazard wherein Afghan leaders neglect their collective responsibilities because they believe that the international community will always bail Afghanistan out. Maintaining these lines of effort has required constant calibration and adjustment. The president's decision to extend the current troop presence is an example of that, and was in my view the correct decision. The U.S. and our international partners should follow this decision up with a strong, unified and tough message that our strong commitment to remain engaged militarily and economically must be matched by a much stronger commitment from Afghanistan's political leaders to demonstrate their ability to govern more effectively. If the past 14 years have demonstrated one thing clearly, it is that progress on the battlefield that is not matched by progress in terms of more accountable and effective governance, rarely has sustained impact. In ministries and other key government institutions where little progress or political will is demonstrated to promote more effective government, the U.S. and other major donors should consider making assistance more conditional. For example, donors should consider rewarding high performing ministries and penalizing low performing ones.

Finally, the government's failure to deliver has led to proposals by Afghan political figures for alternative political arrangements. These include calls for an early presidential election or for convening a Loya Jirga, or grand council. These proposals are destabilizing and should not be entertained by the U.S. For now, there is no alternative to the current government sharply improving its performance and President Ghani completing his normal term of office which ends in 2019.

Security Challenges

We are now at a moment when the traditional "fighting season" in Afghanistan slows down due to winter weather. It has been the bloodiest season yet for the ANDSF, with 4,302 killed in action and 8,009 wounded while fighting the Taliban between January 1 and July 31, 2015 – a 36 percent increase over the same seven-month period in 2014. For the most part the ANDSF were successful in holding territory, although the temporary fall of Kunduz to the Taliban in late September was a major setback both militarily as well as politically for the government.

The chronic violence across the country has meant that civilian casualties remain high. According to the United Nations, the nearly 5,000 civilian casualties (of which approximately 1600 were deaths) in the first half of 2015 was higher than for the same period in 2014. Seventy percent of these casualties are caused by actions of anti-government forces. These are nevertheless highly demoralizing and contribute to the perception that the government is unable to deliver security – one of the highest priorities for Afghans.

The ANDSF are in many ways doing a surprisingly effective job given that they are now only backed by approximately 13,000 US and NATO forces operating in a support role, sharply down from the 2010 peak of 140,000 international forces (including 100,000 U.S. troops) fighting in combat roles alongside the ANDSF. Furthermore, the performance of the ANDSF in 2015 must be judged against the fact that this was the first year that the security forces were fighting without the logistical, medevac, and air support (both airstrikes and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) that they were provided up to the

end of 2014. The lack of close air support and major reductions in U.S. intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets were particularly difficult for the ANDSF to adapt to. However, tactical and logistical weaknesses—in particular problems with relieving and supplying units under attack—were also apparent and need to be addressed.

The government has also had to contend with the ability of the Taliban to effectively fight in the north and northeast, as well as the entrance on the scene of new militant extremist forces fighting the ANDSF (and in some cases the Taliban as well). In 2014, Pakistan's counterterrorism operation in Waziristan had the effect of pushing a number of foreign militant groups into Afghanistan, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Chechens, and the East Turkestan Independence Movement. There have also been credible reports of groups flying the flag of ISIS, or Da'esh as it is more commonly known in Afghanistan, in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province as well as parts of Helmand. While there are certainly groups that identify themselves as ISIS in Afghanistan, it is less clear that there are strong operational and/or financial connections with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Last week the head of Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate for Security, stated that there are fewer than 10 ISIS-affiliated militants in Afghanistan that had actual links to the main ISIS leadership in Iraq and Syria. To date, ISIS does not seem to have been able to expand significantly its control of territory outside a few Afghan districts, and its anti-Shi'a sectarian Salafi version of Islam does not resonate with the vast majority of Afghans who follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. In several cases those raising the ISIS flag are reportedly disgruntled Taliban commanders who have had a falling out with the Quetta shura leadership, and most reports of fighting have been between ISIS and the Taliban rather than between ISIS and the ANDSF.

President Obama's decision to not withdraw US troops by the end of next year should result in greater confidence among Afghan forces that they will not be abandoned. During the winter months, when there is generally a lull in fighting, Afghanistan's security officials will need to carry out a strategic review of what went right and wrong in 2015. The national unity government will also need to take this issue much more seriously. Divisions among the top leadership are reflected at lower levels of government and divide and undermine the efforts of security forces.

The United States must use the strategic review as well as our own security assessments to determine which adjustments need to be made to the 2016 military presence to better support the efforts of Afghan security forces. Afghan security officials that I have spoken to recently consistently pointed to the critical need for more close air support as well as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. The U.S. was very late in trying to build up Afghanistan's own air wing, leaving a major capacity gap in this critical area. This has directly contributed to much higher Afghan ANDSF casualties, greater freedom of movement for the Taliban, and less agility for ANDSF forces. Providing the ANDSF with more close air support and ISR capabilities are two top priorities where the U.S. should do more.

The NATO alliance will meet in Warsaw in June 2016. Now that the withdrawal timeline has been removed, this meeting can be used to establish a realistic set of objectives in Afghanistan after 2016, and match resources and force structures to those objectives without abandoning the fundamental principle of the need for Afghans to increasingly take responsibility for the costs and implementation of their own security. The first priority at Warsaw, however, will be to renew the commitments of financial support to the ANDSF beyond 2016, as well as troop commitments of NATO allies. On this issue, the alliance has remained strong and several of our closest allies reacted immediately to President Obama's decision by stating they would extend their own troop presence.

Economic Shocks

Many analyses and discussions of the current situation in Afghanistan focus on the political and security threats and challenges, but too often overlook the very serious economic crisis facing Afghanistan. In my view, the current economic crisis is one of the most serious threats to the stability of the current government and the constitutional order in Afghanistan. It has been frequently noted, but worth repeating, that it was not the withdrawal of Soviet troops that led to the downfall of the Najibullah regime in 1992, and the resulting descent into a bloody civil war, but the end to the Soviet subsidies following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given the seriousness of the situation, I would like to speak in more detail about the economic situation, and what the Afghan government, the U.S. and our partners can do about it.

The Afghan economy is in dire straits. Economic growth has been very weak—1.3 percent in 2014, compared to averages of around eight or nine percent over the previous decade. Little creation of new jobs has taken place, while job losses due to declining international expenditures and weak investment have been immense. Business and consumer confidence have tanked, and capital and human flight, already significant, appear to have snowballed over the past year. One example of this is that applications for passports in Kabul's passport office increased from approximately 3,000 per month earlier this year to 8,000 per month in September. In contrast to the refugee flows from Afghanistan to neighboring Pakistan and Iran in the 1980s and 1990s, which were primarily from poor rural farming communities, a large number of the Afghans trying to leave today are the educated middle class youth from urban areas whose skills Afghanistan desperately needs in the government, civil society and the private sector.

There are two positive but modest economic trends to note in an otherwise bleak economic situation. First, Afghanistan's own budget revenue has been growing moderately after several years of declines, and is expected by the government to meet the revised IMF target of 114 billion Afghanis (approximately \$1.71 billion) - representing an increase of around 15 percent. While this will still fall well short of the original (unrealistic) budget target of 25 percent revenue growth, the year-end shortfall will be much lower than last year, and demonstrates that the government does have the capability to make basic improvements in a critically important area.

Second, amidst the weak performance of the economy overall, four successive relatively good harvests have meant that agriculture has actually been a stabilizing force in the economy, preventing overall growth from turning negative despite the adverse trends in other sectors. While agriculture in Afghanistan very much depends on the vagaries of the weather, good agricultural performance in recent years may also to some extent reflect the modest investments that have been made in the sector over the past dozen years. Agriculture remains the driver of the Afghan economy and the basis of around 70% of Afghan livelihoods. Good news in this sector is therefore good news across the board. To the extent, however, that such good news is linked to favorable weather rather than favorable policies and investments, these positive developments remain fragile and unpredictable.

Reviving the Afghan economy in the best of times would be challenging. But trying to build an effective private sector in the middle of a war, while working with a dysfunctional coalition government, is extremely difficult indeed, and expectations must be modest. But measures to address the deteriorating economy cannot wait until the conflict abates and deep-seated political issues are fully resolved. There

is a need to think creatively, beyond business-as-usual economic advice, while recognizing the limits to what can be accomplished in what remains a period of civil conflict. Given that the sharp deterioration in the economy is a major cause of the destabilizing lack of confidence and support for the National Unity Government, the U.S. and other major donors should prioritize supporting some politically smart economic initiatives that will help create more breathing space and buy time for President Ghani's government to improve its effectiveness and carry out the reform program it has enunciated. In this regard, USIP has recently published a short paper by economist and Afghan expert Bill Byrd on some measures that might be envisaged, which is available online at our website (www.usip.org).

It will be impossible to fully offset demand shock from declining international military spending and aid. Large amounts of Afghan private capital held outside the country—probably tens of billions of dollars—could be repatriated and invested productively in Afghanistan, but this cannot be expected to happen unless there is greater confidence in the future, a more effective National Unity Government, some credible efforts to combat corruption, and prospects for reduction of violence. Within a broader context where improvements are taking place in at least some of these broader areas, a few specific measures to promote confidence and modestly stimulate overall demand could take place. These are described in greater detail in USIP's paper, but they include starting a few sizable infrastructure projects, implementing urban income support and jobs programs to address the rapid urbanization that has taken place in the past decade, and regularizing the many informal settlements in urban areas to provide the households living on them with security of tenure and greater confidence and sense of security. Here are some examples of policy measures that could be considered to stimulate national production and incomes:

- **Spending programs that target the poor** would increase domestic demand since the poor tend to spend a larger part of their budgets on domestic goods and services.
- **Increasing local procurement** through greater preference for Afghan companies in government tenders, as well as domestic content requirements incorporated in contracts.
- **Imposing moderate import duties on agricultural cash crops**—this is a more radical option, but it addresses the fact that agriculture is one of Afghanistan's only areas of comparative advantage, but its potential is threatened by low-cost competing imports of many agricultural products that flood the Afghan market. A modest, broad-based, and undifferentiated import tariff would help contain imports of vegetables and fruits that can be and are grown in Afghanistan, stimulating domestic production of these goods.
- **Introducing "contract farming"** where businesses in developed countries (grocery chains and the like) contract with farmers in developing countries to grow agricultural products, working closely with them to meet importing countries' standards. The Afghan government could, with donor funding, provide competitively tendered export promotion grants that offset the extra costs of doing business in Afghanistan and make it attractive, or at least feasible, for foreign businesses to engage in this way.
- **Considering modest government borrowing** to create fiscal space, alongside increasing revenues and lowering and restructuring expenditures. In a stagnant economy with low inflation and no near-term balance of payments problems, tight fiscal policy can be a harmful contractionary force, but to date there has been no consideration given to borrowing. In the current situation, modest government borrowing and associated fiscal deficits could moderately stimulate the economy, and at least would not make the situation worse.

A modest economic revival in Afghanistan will come about only through a combination of actions that, taken together, achieve a critical mass that may be able to break through the severe headwinds the economy faces. Restoring confidence will be critical to raising demand and, over time, unlocking the large amounts of Afghan money potentially available for private investment. In this regard, President Obama's decision not to withdraw troops by the end of 2016 and to remain engaged will help boost confidence. A meeting of NATO allies and other Afghan partners in Brussels in 2016, at which international donors are expected to renew and expand upon their non-military assistance commitments to Afghanistan and update the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework agreed to in 2012, will provide another opportunity to send confidence-building signals on the economy. If the Afghan government does its part to take serious actions to revive the economy—including not least through greater political effectiveness—donors should respond proactively, and with funding decisions based on a clear assessment of what has worked and not worked in the past.

I'd like to make a few observations specifically about development assistance to Afghanistan rather than economic issues writ large. I used to be a strong critic of the amount of money that the U.S. was spending on civilian assistance programs in Afghanistan. I argued that trying to spend too much money too quickly in insecure environments with weak government institutions was having a destabilizing rather than a stabilizing effect. A two-year research project I led in Afghanistan from 2008-2010 found that the vast amount of military and civilian resources the U.S. and others pumped into insecure areas helped fuel the corruption that delegitimized the government, which in turn strengthened the insurgency. One of my main concerns now, however, is that we risk going from the extreme of giving too much to the opposite extreme of giving too little, within a dangerously short timeframe. There is no doubt that the large war and aid economy that developed since 2002 created an unsustainable economic bubble. However, the best way to address the bubble economy in Afghanistan is not to pop it, which will (and is already) having a politically destabilizing effect, but to let the air out slowly over a period of time.

I am actually quite optimistic that reductions in assistance levels, if not done too drastically over too short a period of time, will lead to significant improvements in the quality of assistance programs in Afghanistan. Budget reductions will require much greater prioritization so that limited resources can be used to support the most critical needs. Reduced budgets also create an opportunity to shift the compulsion to spend money quickly to maintain 'burn rates' based on perverse 'use it or lose it' budget incentive structures, to instead prioritize the quality rather than the quantity of programming. As I noted in my opening remarks, it would be tragic to lose sight of the tremendous development gains that have been made in the past 14 years, and to instead focus only on the problems and mistakes as an excuse to withdraw aid too quickly.

Peace Process Obstacles and Opportunities

I would like to conclude by saying a few words about the prospects for substantive political negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban to reduce violence levels, and ultimately reach a political settlement that ends the Taliban-led insurgency. In the first half of this year there were some hopes that a possible dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban might have resulted at least in a temporary ceasefire, although probably not a more comprehensive political settlement. These talks were the result of a concerted policy by President Ghani in which he made significant and sustained concessions to Pakistan in exchange for Pakistan using its leverage over the Taliban to bring them to the negotiating table. Ghani's conciliatory approach to Pakistan came at considerable domestic

political cost, as he was widely criticized by many Afghans who could see no tangible evidence that Pakistan was giving anything in return for his concessions. Instead, the intensity and scale of Taliban attacks steadily increased throughout most of the year, along with reports of increased rather than reduced Pakistani support for the Taliban.

Ghani's outreach to Pakistan, however, did eventually contribute to Pakistan using its influence to pressure the Taliban to participate in the first round of officially acknowledged direct talks between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban. These Pakistan-facilitated talks were held in early July in Murree, Pakistan, with officials from China and the U.S. participating as observers. A second and more promising round of Murree talks was scheduled for late July, but a few days before the talks they were indefinitely postponed following media reports that Mullah Omar had died two years earlier. The news of Mullah Omar's death created a power struggle within the Taliban that has not yet been fully settled, but which ultimately led to the appointment of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor to succeed Mullah Omar as the head of the main Taliban faction. The internal Taliban power struggle was accompanied by a sharp increase in Taliban attacks in August, including a number of attacks in Kabul attributed to the Haqqani Network, followed by the temporary fall of Kunduz to the Taliban in late September.

The Taliban leadership struggle and the upsurge in violence halted what little momentum there may have been to get a peace process on track. During the past month there have been significant diplomatic efforts by the U.S., China and Pakistan to restart the talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. During the visit to the U.S. by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in October, followed by the November visit by Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, Afghanistan was reportedly the top agenda item. These visits, along with visits by senior U.S. government officials to Pakistan and Afghanistan in November, and the recent appointment by Mullah Mansour of former Taliban health minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai to lead the Taliban's "political office" in Qatar, have renewed hopes that another round of direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban may soon be held. Recent media reports suggest that the Paris Climate Change Conference this week, and the "Heart of Asia" Istanbul-process conference involving Afghanistan and its neighbors that is being held next week in Islamabad, which both President Ghani and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif are likely to attend, could provide an opportunity for mending the badly damaged relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This, in turn, could pave the way for the resumption of another round of talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

While another round of talks may be agreed upon, there are still major obstacles in the path of the talks leading to agreements that would reduce levels of violence in Afghanistan. One of the biggest obstacles is that there are currently few incentives for the Taliban to engage in substantive peace talks, especially when they feel they have the upper hand on the battlefield. Peace talks are also a contentious and divisive issue within Taliban ranks, and Mullah Mansoor is therefore likely to try to use battlefield gains to boost his own legitimacy and control over various Taliban factions, and to try to unify the Taliban ranks around fighting a common enemy. This is not to say that he and other Taliban leaders will not want to engage in peace negotiations at some point in the future. Some Taliban leaders reportedly recognize that they cannot decisively defeat the ANDSF and retake control of all of Afghanistan, and that at some point they will need to negotiate a political settlement. Furthermore, the Taliban themselves are suffering heavy casualties, disunity among the leadership, and growing unpopularity as Afghan civilian and military casualty rates resulting from Taliban violence increases, and those of foreign forces shrink to close to zero. But it seems unlikely that at this point in time Mullah Mansoor will want to risk further internal conflict and fragmentation by making significant concessions in a peace process.

It will also be politically difficult for President Ghani to appear to be making more concessions to Pakistan given the intense domestic criticism he received when violence levels increased following the previous concessions he made. During the past few months the already difficult Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relationship has turned even more acrimonious, with senior Afghan officials publicly accusing the Pakistani ISI of involvement in the upsurge in Taliban-led violence, including the fall of Kunduz. Despite pressure from the U.S. and Chinese to reengage with Pakistan and resume talks with the Taliban, it will be difficult for President Ghani to do so unless he is convinced that the talks will lead to significant reductions in violence, which in turn would help to legitimize his outreach efforts. President Ghani is reportedly demanding evidence of concrete measures by Pakistan to pressure the Taliban and restrict their activities and freedom of movement in Pakistan.

President Ghani's political capital for negotiations is limited not only due to his concessions to Pakistan not being reciprocated, but also because of the poor performance of the National Unity Government. There is an urgent need for the Afghan government and political class to demonstrate their commitment to make the government more effective, and to win back the confidence and support of the Afghan people. This, in turn, would greatly strengthen the hand of the government in any negotiation process with the Taliban. It would also create additional policy options, incentives, points of leverage, and diplomatic and military support that could help shift the balance of power inside Afghanistan, and the calculus of Afghanistan's various neighbors. Until then, the options of the U.S. and other major donors are limited by the government's disunity and weakness.

In addition to the obstacles to peace created by Afghan actors, regional actors – most notably Pakistan – have played a major role in fueling conflict in Afghanistan. The Pakistan military's main strategic objective in Afghanistan is to ensure minimal Indian influence. For more than two decades the Afghan Taliban/Haqqani Network have been a central component of Pakistan's strategy to achieve this objective. After more than a decade of unsuccessful efforts by the U.S. and its NATO allies to convince Pakistan to alter its strategic calculus and stop providing safe havens for the Afghan Taliban/Haqqani Network in Pakistan, it seems unlikely that Pakistan will suddenly decide to fundamentally alter this policy now. While Ghani is still perceived by Pakistani officials to be a much better partner than his predecessor, he is increasingly viewed in Pakistan as too politically weak to deliver on any agreements that are reached. Ultimately, the combination of deteriorating security in Afghanistan along with a government that is getting politically weaker will only further strengthen the hand of those in Pakistan who believe that now is not the time to burn bridges with the Taliban.

At an event at USIP during Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's October visit to Washington he said that Pakistan "cannot bring them [the Taliban] to the table and kill them at the same time." This was a clear indication that Pakistan, while willing to pressure some of the Taliban factions over which it has influence to return to the negotiating table, is not willing to forcefully crackdown on Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan. It is also not at all clear that Pakistan is willing, or indeed able, to force the Taliban to make the necessary compromises that would enable the peace negotiations to ultimately lead to a significant reduction in violence and/or a comprehensive peace agreement.

What does the U.S. need to do to support peace in Afghanistan? The last 14 years have made clear that there is not a military solution alone to ending the conflict in Afghanistan, and the U.S. therefore must continue to look for opportunities to support inclusive political processes that could help lead to a durable settlement to end the conflict. This will require patience and a long-term commitment to

remain engaged in Afghanistan, as progress towards reducing violence levels is much more likely to come in a number of smaller steps and agreements rather than as the result of one large grand bargain. It will therefore be important to remain realistic about the very significant obstacles in the path of peace, and to not pin too many hopes on a grand bargain as our quick fix exit strategy from Afghanistan. At the same time, the regional situation is not static, and the U.S. should be ready to take advantage of changing dynamics and interests that could create new opportunities incentivize and support a peace process. Of particular note is China's growing concerns about the impact of instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan on its restive Xinjiang region, and the resulting increased interest it has shown in helping to support and facilitate Afghanistan peace talks. Overall, however, the single most important thing the U.S. can do now to support an inclusive peace process is to help ensure that the Afghan state does not collapse and that there is a legitimate Afghan government that can participate in peace negotiations.

The top political demand of the Taliban has been the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan before engaging substantively in a peace process. It might therefore seem at first glance that President Obama's decision to keep troops in Afghanistan beyond 2016 could be a setback for a politically negotiated end to the conflict. In my view, however, it would not have made sense from a negotiating point of view to give the Taliban their number one demand without extracting any concession in return. Furthermore, the decision to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan will help strengthen the hand of the Afghan government by enabling it to negotiate from a position of greater strength. If the Taliban thought all foreign troops were leaving, and that their prospects for gaining more ground militarily and bringing about the downfall of the government had improved, there would be very little incentive for them to negotiate. If the Taliban ever do get serious about engaging in a process that could lead to a politically negotiated end to the conflict, then the presence of foreign troops could be one of the trump cards in that negotiation. President Obama essentially stated this in his October 15 press statement:

By now it should be clear to the Taliban and all who oppose Afghanistan's progress the only real way to achieve the full drawdown of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan is through a lasting political settlement with the Afghan government. Likewise, sanctuaries for the Taliban and other terrorists must end.

Recommendations

As noted at the outset, it is in the U.S. national security interests to help ensure a relatively peaceful and stable Afghanistan that does not slide back into civil war and anarchy, destabilize its neighbors, or once again become a safe haven for transnational terrorist groups. The most effective way for the U.S. to achieve this objective is to not prematurely disengage from Afghanistan. President Obama's decision to maintain current U.S. troop levels through 2016, and to maintain a force of 5,500 beyond 2016, sends a very strong message that America's commitment to "a secure, stable and unified Afghanistan" remains firm.

At the same time, this commitment represents a necessary condition for our Afghan strategy, not an endpoint. Troop commitments, while significant, form only one element of our larger engagement with Afghanistan. Achieving our interest in securing Afghanistan's stability requires further steps from both U.S., international, and Afghan policymakers that tackle the security, political, and economic roots of the conflict.

In summary, my recommendations are focused in four areas: political, security, economic and peace negotiations with the Taliban.

Political Divisions

- Resolving the political crisis, and increasing confidence in the government, is first and foremost the responsibility of Afghanistan's leaders and political elites who have, to date, demonstrated insufficient political will to resolve differences and govern effectively. Afghanistan's national unity government must begin to act more like the unified government of a country facing a national crisis. The U.S. and our international partners should clearly convey that our strong commitment to remain engaged militarily and economically must be matched by a much stronger commitment from Afghanistan's political leaders to govern more effectively. In ministries and other key government institutions where little progress or political will is demonstrated to promote more effective government, the U.S. and other major donors should consider making assistance more conditional by rewarding high performing ministries and penalizing low performing ones.
- The U.S. should not support destabilizing calls by Afghan political opposition leaders for early presidential elections or for any unconstitutional measures to prematurely end the tenure of the current government. For now, there is no alternative to the current government improving its performance and serving out its term.

Security Challenges

- NATO allies meeting in Warsaw next year must renew their commitments to fund and support the ANDSF and to provide international troops as part of a continuing Train, Advise and Assist mission past 2016. Strong signaling of continued financial support to the Afghan security forces at current levels is essential to maintaining the cohesiveness of the ANDSF.
- Afghan forces are suffering greatly without adequate Close Air Support (CAS). The United States needs to help Afghanistan develop a creative, simple, interim solution to this problem to give the Afghans CAS capability that they can deploy themselves now. This is a key operational priority and a crucial psychological one for the ANDSF.

Economic Shocks

- The U.S. should play a strong leadership role at the international donor conference on Afghanistan taking place in Brussels in October 2016, to ensure that major donor countries renew their commitments to maintaining robust levels of civilian assistance to Afghanistan.
- To help reduce the possibility of civil unrest due to economic discontent, and to buy the Ghani administration some political space and time to get a reform agenda and a peace process on track, the U.S. and other friends of Afghanistan should provide more flexible financial resources to the Afghan government that can be used to help stimulate the economy and create jobs. Several possible initiatives have been proposed by Ghani's team, USIP and others.
- Although Afghanistan's security threats and political divisions are the primary determining factors, reforms focused on instilling greater levels of investor confidence can potentially help to modestly stimulate overall economic demand. Some priority steps include a few sizable infrastructure projects, urban income support and jobs programs, and the regularization of informal urban settlements to increase household tenure security.

Peace Process

- The last 14 years have made clear that there is not a military solution alone to ending the conflict in Afghanistan. The U.S. must therefore continue to look for opportunities to support inclusive political processes that could help reduce violence and/or end the conflict. This will require patience and a long-term commitment to remain engaged in Afghanistan, as progress towards reducing violence levels is much more likely to come through a number of smaller steps and agreements rather than as the result of one large grand bargain.
- Overall, the single most important thing the U.S. can do now to support an inclusive peace process is to help ensure that the Afghan state does not collapse and that there is a legitimate Afghan government that can participate in peace negotiations.
- The decision to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan will help strengthen the hand of the government by enabling it to participate in any future negotiations from a position of greater strength. But the Afghan government and political class must also demonstrate a unity of purpose through which to clearly signal to the Taliban, Pakistan, and other relevant actors that Afghanistan's government will be an enduring presence for stability in the country.
- An inclusive peace process requires bottom-up peacebuilding efforts to complement top-down efforts. The U.S. should continue to support a wide range of civil society actors, including organizations working to defend and promote the gains in terms of women's rights, human rights, the rule of law, the delivery of social services, a free and independent media, etc., and ensure that the voices of civil society actors are heard in peace negotiations.

Failure to take these kinds of actions in my view would deal a nearly mortal blow to the National Unity Government. It would virtually ensure that the reconciliation process fails, and will enhance the terrorist threat to our friends and allies in the region and to the United States. It will also present President Obama's successor with a strategic failure and a serious security crisis in the opening days of the next administration.

However, these measures, taken together, offer the possibility of a significant American foreign policy success story in a very troubled region of the world. If these measures can help produce a sustainable peace between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even a significant portion of the Taliban, and help prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for transnational terrorist groups, it will be a major contribution to regional and global stability. It will also help redeem the commitment of blood and treasure that the United States, the coalition, and the Afghan people have made over more than a decade of effort.

Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, and I am happy to take questions.

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author and not the U.S. Institute of Peace, which does not take policy positions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Thank you to all three of you for excellent testimony. I would first like to recognize Major Adrian Foster who served in Iraq and accompanied our codel to Afghanistan. Take a bow; come on. Thank you, Major, for your service. Thank you.

My questions are in three categories: Afghan security forces capabilities, drug trade, and then, thirdly, Afghan governance. Dr. Kagan, the first one is to you. As much as we want the Afghan security forces to take the lead in the defense of Afghanistan. It is their country, and they have shown vast improvements no doubt. We still have many national security interests at stake that are too important to leave to uncertainty.

You have warned that enemy expansion in Afghanistan, including ISIL, will accelerate under our current strategy. You have also argued that we must reconsider our current force posture in Afghanistan as well as our rules of engagement that several of you have pointed out.

So I ask, why is our current mission limited to only counterterror operations against al-Qaeda and not all insurgent groups including ISIS, and how would you assess the Afghan security forces' current capability to counter the threats it faces from ISIS, other terror groups? What should our rules of engagement be?

Mr. KAGAN. The Afghan security forces were never built having in mind that they would have to operate under the conditions that they are now operating in as David Sedney pointed out. First of all, the assumptions underlying their structure were that they would face a much more mild insurgency that had been beaten down significantly. That is not the case.

And it was also assumed that the United States and the international coalition would continue to provide significant high-end enablers in their fight against the Taliban as well as in their fight against al-Qaeda and other such organizations. So they are now engaged in a fight for which they were never designed and structured, which is one of the reasons why they are struggling so badly. It is important for us to recognize that their primary enemy is not al-Qaeda, and their primary enemy is not ISIS, nor will it be. Their primary enemy is the group that can destroy the Afghan state.

And so in the sense, to the extent that we define our only interest in Afghanistan as going after terrorists and we limit our support to the Afghan security forces to that, we will not succeed in eliminating terrorists because we can't do that without a partner, and our partner will die because it is not those terrorists that are threatening it.

So in my opinion, it is an enormous mistake that this administration has made consistently over the years to try to narrow the scope of our interests in Afghanistan exclusively to target its attacks fundamentally on terrorist leaders without recognizing the cataclysmic failure of that approach across the globe, but also without recognizing that it creates a high likelihood of what we are now seeing, which is that whatever gains we might make there will be washed out as insurgent groups that we are not allowing our troops to fight properly alongside the Afghans take over and destroy our partners.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much Dr. Kagan. I would like to discuss our counternarcotics operation in country. We know that much of the profits from the illicit drug trade in Afghanistan goes to fund terror activities in Afghanistan and worldwide. However, our DEA and INL presence has been dramatically decreased there. The Afghans aren't yet fully capable of leading this kind of large-scale mission. Since these two are tied together, the drug trade and terror, shouldn't we place a greater emphasis on ending the drug trade in Afghanistan? Is that possible realistically?

We go after the financing of other terror groups as part of our plan to counter and defeat them. We need to do so in Afghanistan as well. Why do we not? Is it because we don't think that that would be successful? To whoever would like to answer. Thank you, Dr. Sedney.

Mr. SEDNEY. Others can add as well. But counternarcotics was an area that when we were doing our counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan in 2009, 2010, and 2011 and into 2012, we did take some efforts there, and USAID and others have cooperated as well. What we found by looking around the globe, however, is the only way you can effectively go after the narcotics industry is a holistic way. It is not just a security threat. It is not just the traffickers. You have to find ways to work with the farmers, give alternate crops, and you have to continue that. We did for about 2 years have some success in Helmand province, where a crop substitution program, a voucher program, combined with very aggressive enforcement efforts and military action against traffickers, that was making progress, but then we pulled back from that.

We don't have the resources right now to carry that out. So sadly I would say as a consequence of our decision to pull back across the board in Afghanistan, counternarcotics, which I agree with you on the importance of, is an area where we are just not positioned to do really much at all that can be effective.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Wilder?

Mr. WILDER. Yeah. If I can just add on that point. I have some good news and bad news. The good news is the cultivation area decreased this year by about 19 percent for opium poppy, and opium production actually reduced by nearly 48 percent. The bad news is it doesn't seem to be a result of counternarcotic efforts, but more due to farmer decisions about harvest, crop issues. But I agree with David that I think the larger issue is ultimately you do need a holistic approach, and it relates to broadly improving the security situation and then working with our Government, the Afghan Government, to try to improve governance and the rule of law. And I think that is though an area where we can be more optimistic because we do have a partner in the new government that I think does want to promote the rule of law and takes the issue of poppy production seriously in contrast to his predecessor.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And speaking of governance, as part of our assistance to Afghanistan, the U.S. provides at least half of that development aid directly through the Afghan budget. How can we take steps to ensure that we are mitigating all of the risks inherent in our direct assistance, and for sure the new management is tackling the problem of corruption? How can we help Afghanistan to step it up more?

Mr. WILDER. Well I will take a stab at it, but then if others also want to add. I am actually very supportive of the idea of more on-budget assistance. The evidence actually shows that most corruption in Afghanistan was not the corruption from what went through the budget. That was actually a good control system. It was largely a lot of the money that was spent off budget, and now again with a more reform-oriented government in place which is trying to take measures to crack down on corruption, I would be supportive of trying to give the new government the support it needs through a more on-budget assistance.

I do think, however, that the issue of performance is mixed. We have some ministers who are more reform oriented and more effective than others. And the issue of improved government is critically important. I mean if there is one lesson from the last 14 years in Afghanistan, it is that military gains on the battlefield are not sufficient. They really have to be matched by better governance. And I think that is where maybe with our assistance we need to have some more conditions attached of rewarding the better performing ministers and ministries and penalizing those that don't.

So I do think there is room for conditions, and I actually think President Ghani himself is supportive of this, and I would actually laud the new development partnership agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan which actually targets \$800 million which is released in tranches based on performance measures being achieved by the Afghan Government. So I think that kind of assistance, we are getting smarter at this, and I am confident with the new government we will have better achievements than we had in the past.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Let's hope so. Thank you so much. Mr. Boyle is recognized.

Mr. BOYLE. Thank you. I just was struck by how positively received President Ghani was when he spoke here in his joint session to Congress, so it is not just the failure of the previous President, but also a positive reflection on the new President himself.

But, I wanted to just shift focus for a second. One of you talked about this in your opening statements. But the current relationship and partnership between Abdullah and President Ghani, how likely is this to be a durable alliance?

Mr. SEDNEY. I mentioned it; I think Andrew did as well. I think it is likely to be a durable alliance. I know both men. I consider both of them personal friends, and I admire what they have done. The issue is that the whole structure of governance in Afghanistan is filled with people who are rich, are powerful, and in many cases are criminal, and fixing that is a job that would be a challenge for anyone who didn't have an insurgency at their door and all the other problems Afghanistan would have. I don't think the United States has done enough to help this partnership work together, and I think that is an area where we could do more politically to make it effective.

I think, however I will stress that I think the two individuals involved are actually trying very hard to work together, but there are huge networks out there that are fighting each other.

Mr. WILDER. If I could add just one point there. I very much agree with David on that, but I think the problem is not so much Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah who I think have been able to work

along. It is some of the groups around them which have become more problematic, but it is a serious problem, and I think the dysfunction is now creating a big rumor mill in Kabul; maybe we need plan B arrangements, and maybe we should loya jirga to rethink this whole process or have early elections, and I would strongly recommend that the U.S. Government position continue to be that there really isn't a plan B.

Plan B is to make plan A work and not give any encouragement to those who want to try to destabilize the current government. Because it is not, I think, performing nearly as well as it needs to, but it would be I think a real political disaster and very politically destabilizing if we start looking at alternative arrangements.

Mr. BOYLE. You wanted to add, Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. I do. Thank you. I agree with almost everything that was just said. I think unfortunately a loya jirga was a part of the plan under which this government was set up, and I think the government is going to run into some very serious problems when it does not conduct a loya jirga, much as I agree with you about the risks that that poses and the undesirability of that.

This government reflects much of what U.S. policy toward its problems in the region has been consistently for the past couple of decades, which is an attempt to use, to cajole elites to form an elite settlement of some sort on the assumption that that would solve societal problems that are creating openings for our enemies. It has not worked hardly anywhere we have tried it.

And I raise the point because we are doing something similar in Syria right now, where we are imagining that if we bring the elites, many of whom don't even represent anyone on the ground at this point, together and get them to sign up to some sort of agreement, that that will have a practical manifestation that will be important. The truth of the matter is that what has to happen in Afghanistan and many other places that are now riven by internal conflict, is that the populations and the affected constituencies have to form a new agreement about how the state is going to run.

And the more that we, for very pragmatic reasons having to do with our own timelines and our desire to have partners that we can work with to execute our timelines, the more that we drive toward elite settlements that exclude the interests of large portions of the constituency, the more we create instability and governments that, as the one in Afghanistan, I do agree with David, that both men are trying to make it work, and I agree with Dr. Wilder that the people around them are the principal problem. But the fact that this is simply an elite settlement at this point is the core problem in my view.

Mr. BOYLE. So let me ask you, because you provided kind of a natural segue then, and it is touching upon something that you reference in your written testimony. To what extent in Afghanistan is our fight against the Taliban, our fight against remnants of al-Qaeda, our fight against ISIS or really just one small battle in the larger war against the caliphate?

Mr. KAGAN. Well the struggle against ISIS is a battle in the war against the caliphate, and it needs to be seen in that way, the struggle against al-Qaeda likewise. And so if the difficulty that we are all having figuring out how the administration sees the connec-

tions between these battles in Afghanistan and the struggles against al-Qaeda and ISIS elsewhere is a measure of the failure to articulate a meaningful strategy in that regard.

The Taliban is a fascinating phenomenon because it is not in itself directly a threat to the United States in the sense that it continues not to have as its objective attacking us here, but it is a threat to the United States in the sense that it persists in a willingness to work with and host and support those groups that do. And so we continue to face the risk that a resurgent Taliban, because it wishes to or whether it is because it has no alternative—because after all, the Taliban government didn't exactly control all of the territory that it claimed to—will allow itself once again to become the host on which the terrorist parasites can breed and grow and attack us.

Mr. BOYLE. Which was the case with September 11 of course.

Mr. KAGAN. Exactly, exactly.

Mr. BOYLE. I know I went over, and so I guess I will yield to the next person up on the other side. Thank you.

Mr. DESANTIS [presiding]. I think that that is me since I am the only one up here.

Mr. BOYLE. I believe this is our opportunity to rewrite the rules.

Mr. DESANTIS. That is right. I will go ahead and recognize myself for 5 minutes. You know, the frustrating thing about this, I think is that when the President ran for election he specifically demagogued the issue of Afghanistan and said, look, Iraq is this bad war. Afghanistan is a great war. We have got to do it right. I am sick of what we are doing with this administration. They took their eye off the ball. And I am going to go get that done, and we are going to win that.

And really I think that that was just rhetoric that made him, because he was against one of the conflicts, it made him appear to the voters that he was tough about terrorism, but really has not had his heart in this from the very beginning, and I think the results really speak for themselves.

Now, Mr. Sedney, what specifically in terms of the rules of engagement is your recommendation?

Mr. SEDNEY. Well, first of all, we should make the rules of engagement clear. But, secondly, the rules of engagement reflect the problem that has been identified and Dr. Kagan mentioned as well. Because we don't see the Taliban as a threat, we are not allowed to use our air forces, our air support, our close air support, against the Taliban unless our forces are in danger or if Afghan forces are in some great extremis.

So when Afghan forces plan operations, when they try to do what we have trained them to do, they don't get any close air support. We are not allowed to promise them that, and they aren't allowed to try and anticipate it, and they don't get it. So our rules of engagement are so narrow and so complex that most of our troops don't really understand them well. The Afghans don't understand them.

Over this year, the way the Taliban have operated, I think they have been probing so see where air power is used and where it isn't. And where it is not used, they have gone from using tens and scores of fighters to using masses of hundreds of fighters. In the

coming year I expect them to use thousands of fighters. We need to change those rules of engagement so we can support the Afghan forces and give them the fire power they need. And the reason they need the fire power is because we meant to build them an air force, but we didn't, so the Afghans don't have their own close air support. We promised them, with the stress on promised them, Super Tucanos to arrive in 2018. That will be too late.

So even if the Afghans, even if our rules of engagement are changed, we still need to help the Afghans on that in the longer term. But the rules of engagement need to be changed to reflect the situation on the ground and allow us to aid the Afghan forces, including in planned engagements. We have to recognize that the Taliban are the enemy of our ally, and we need to be prepared to fight them.

Mr. DESANTIS. See, I think our rules of engagement have been problematic for quite some time predating this administration, but this is just totally farcical. If you are engaged in a stabilization, counterinsurgency-type mission, and you have these ridiculously restrictive rules of engagement, you are going to lose. You are going to lose. That is just the bottom line, because you are giving the enemy a huge advantage when you are talking about engaging in the conflict. And why would we want to cede to the bad actors in the area, these huge advantages by having these, yes, not just restrictive, and I think as you point out, very complex rules of engagement. I think that is the worse thing to put a trigger puller out there or have people who could—I mean, we are seeing it a little bit with the air campaign against ISIS where it is very difficult to even know if you have authorization to strike a target. So this is not the way, I think, that we should be fighting these campaigns. And the problem is so much of it is based on political considerations, worried about bad headlines, and so on and so forth.

And so, I think it is an absolutely critical point that you made. I think everything you said, I agree with. And I would go even further than yes, in this situation, but I think overall as we have looked at the war on terrorism, I think we have had rules of engagement that have just been too restrictive from the very beginning. Yes.

Mr. SEDNEY. Can I had that in addition to the rules of engagement, one thing that is really hurting us is the lack of effective intelligence. We have removed most of the intelligence collection ability that we had in Afghanistan just a year ago. And I am talking about drones here, but not just predators, but the smaller ones, the handheld Scan Eagles and the ones in between that gave us a complete picture of the battlefield.

So even with the rules of engagement, we don't have the visibility that is necessary to identify targets and strike them accurately and capably. We can't find out where those Taliban attacks are coming from and go after them. This is a technical capability the Afghans just don't have—

Mr. DESANTIS. And it compounds the rules of engagement issue because when you have very restrictive rules of engagement, you rely on having all this wonderful intelligence. Otherwise you can't do anything. You have to wait for people to start shooting at you. And so the premium, if you are going to do restrictive rules of en-

gagement, you absolutely have got to do very robust intelligence; and yet we seem to be failing on both ends. And so I appreciate the comments and thank the chairwoman. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Where did you serve, Mr. DeSantis?

Mr. DESANTIS. I was in Iraq, but we had similar situations. I mean, part of it is when you are a counterinsurgency situation, you can't necessarily tell who is bad and who is good just by looking at them. They all wear man dresses or what have you. But, if you put our troops in these situations where they have to wait until they get shot at, well that is not fighting to win. And from what the testimony in Afghanistan, I think the problem is even worse than it was in Iraq.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Well, we thank for your service. My stepson and daughter-in-law served in Iraq in that confusing situation, and she served in Afghanistan as well. And the rules of engagement are still so crazy. Thank you for your service. Mr. Clawson is recognized.

Mr. CLAWSON. So we thank you again for coming and for your viewpoints. Appreciate it. We roll back our support, our financial commitment, resource commitment, at all levels and from what I am hearing kind of to the point that the place is held together by contractors that just keep the HUMVEEs running, and if the contractors left, we might not even get the maintenance done—and I am not talking about drones. I am just talking about vehicles. Right?

And then at the same time we put together, I think it was you, Mr. Sedney, that said a government of elites—or was that Dr. Kagan—of corrupt elites, and while the common man and woman is dying in the battlefield, so underresourced, elite leadership at the top that is viewed as corrupt. And, you know, I just kind of wonder if I was a typical Afghan combatant, if all the leaders had second homes in Virginia as their golden parachute, which is the rumor out there, right, and probably a lot of them do. Why would their soldiers want to fight, and why would we send our soldiers, people that are important to us on a personal level, to fight and die for folks who have a golden parachute already established because they have a summer home in the United States, and they are corrupt to begin with?

If there is not a leadership change, in any company, if the top guy is corrupt, then it is all the money for him or her, you can get anybody to work. So if there is no—you know, I would like to say rules of engagement ought to be changed, which is what Ron is saying, or we ought to put in more commitments or more resources and get our allies to do the same thing, but if we have elite folks with summer homes in California or Virginia running the show and they are corrupt, why would we do any of that? And if we don't start with leadership, where do we start? Am I missing here, or are you all agreeing with me?

Mr. KAGAN. Sir, I would disagree with you on a couple of points. First of all, I have never advocated and never would advocate sending American soldiers into Afghanistan to fight for the—

Mr. CLAWSON. No, no. I am not saying you are advocating. I am sorry if you took it that way.

Mr. KAGAN. No, no. I am not. I didn't. But to fight for the Afghan leadership. We send American troops to Afghanistan to fight for the American people. And so, at the moment that I become convinced that it is not necessary to have American troops in Afghanistan because of the vital national interests of the American people, I will be here telling you that I think we shouldn't have American troops in Afghanistan.

Mr. CLAWSON. But are we asking too much by asking folks to go to war with leaders that are not committed and that have different—when their incentives are not aligned with the incentives of the frontline folks, you have a disaster, and I just think that is unethical.

Mr. KAGAN. And the second point I would make is that I think that that point was extremely valid when we were talking about Hamid Karzai. I think it is not valid when we are talking about Ashraf Ghani.

Mr. CLAWSON. All three of you all agree with that? And I am talking about the layers below that.

Mr. KAGAN. Well I think it is very complicated when you get to the layers below that, and I think that what we have with President Ghani is a President who actually is committed to doing everything that you want him to do, and he is finding a great difficulty in doing that and we have frankly not been, as my colleagues on the panel—providing him a lot of support in that effort because for all of the discussion of smart power in this administration, fundamentally the only strategy that they really focus on is swatting bad guys.

And I think that this is an area where you are right, that we need to have a major leadership change below the level of President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah. But President Ghani is trying to make that happen. What are we doing to help? That is a great question to direct to the administration and ask them. What are you doing to help empower the guy who is trying to change the toxic environment that you have been describing, because that was not the case when President Karzai was in power.

Mr. SEDNEY. If I can just add, I am going to second very strongly what Fred said about Dr. Ghani. Dr. Ghani was an American citizen. He did have a home in Bethesda. He sold the home. He gave up his American citizenship. Went back to Afghanistan 6 years again. Has been the target of multiple, very serious attempts on his life. He is not a corrupt person, and I think he deserves our support in ways that President Karzai never did.

And there are many other Afghans like them, the current acting minister of defense, the Taliban, the suicide bomber that blew up 5 feet from him and virtually killed him. He is now back working, but he will never be the same person because of that. The commander of the second corps of Afghanistan lost four brothers to the Taliban. He fights because he knows that if he doesn't fight, his people will die. I have talked to Afghans who are fighting because they want their daughters to go to school.

I think there are lots—yes, there are corrupt people in Afghanistan and in their government, and they need to be gotten rid of; but there are many more who are fighting for many of the same ideals we are, and that is where our interests are congruent, be-

cause by keeping the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, that will make us safer. So while I agree with the concerns about corruption, and it is very serious, I have personal experience with many, many Afghans who I admire.

I would like to mention one more thing, Mr. Clawson, because you talked about our allies. Last week Germany said it would increase its forces by 130. That is a 15-percent increase. And so while our President is getting kudos from people—and I think it was a good thing that he decided not to decrease our forces—the Germans who have I think, a better understanding, are putting more of their troops on the line and increasing their forces by 15 percent. That is something I think we should be thinking about doing, too, not for corrupt people, but for our own national security.

Mr. WILDER. If I could just add to that, to highlight again the high cost that is being paid by the Afghan armed forces now. Just in the first 7 months of this year, we had 4,300 Afghan national defense service forces killed in Afghan and 8,000 wounded. That contrasts with the tragic loss of 2,300 approximately, Americans in the last 14 years in Afghanistan. But in the first 7 months, there was 4,300 killed, 8,000 injured.

So that to me that is one of the biggest differences in Afghanistan and say an Iraq situation where we have an ANDSF which is fighting hard, and we now do have new leadership in Afghanistan that I think does want to be a strong partner, and I think as David mentioned earlier, the irony is that we gave a lot more resources when we didn't really have a partner and we are pulling them away now when actually we do have a government that wants to partner with us.

Mr. CLAWSON. What I hear all three of you saying is that we are off to a better start this time around and a lot more work to do. Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much Mr. Clawson, and if I could ask each of you three to give us a 2-minute summary of the one takeaway that you want us to make sure that we do in Congress or that we don't do.

Mr. KAGAN. Ma'am, we have a vital national security interest in ensuring that Afghanistan does not become again a base for transnational terrorists who intend to attack the United States and its allies. We are at severe risk of having that happen. The current strategy that the President is pursuing will allow that to happen. We must reverse that strategy. There are a lot of things that are involved in reversing that strategy. As an early champion of Task Force Shafafiyat, which was all about the anticorruption effort, I agree with the criticality of dealing with governance issues, helping President Ghani do that. I think that the administration needs to be a lot more engaged in that, and I recognize that there is no purely military solution to a problem. However, this is a war, and there is no purely political solution to most wars.

And so we need to look to what our military approach here is. There is a tyranny of terrain in Afghanistan. If you want to have bases where you need them to fight the enemy, there is a certain minimum footprint that you need to have. I have gone through this drill myself with my own teams. I have watched this drill in theater multiple times. The bottom line is if you are below about

20,000 troops total, you are going to leave uncovered critical areas and critical units, and you are going to invite the reestablishment of certain kind of safe havens. No one wants to hear that number, and I am going to tell you, ma'am, that is a bottom end number. But the truth of the matter is that where we are is not sustainable from the standpoint of a strategy that can secure our homeland in Afghanistan.

And I would only add because I have the privilege of speaking to Congress, Congress is part of the problem here because if you go back to the Army and ask them to put 20,000 or 30,000 troops in Afghanistan right now, they are going to talk to you about how difficult that is and about how impossible it is going to become if sequester is allowed to hit, if the Budget Control Act remains, if we continue to disarm our Nation as the world becomes more dangerous and wars and enemies expand. Thank you ma'am.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Message received. Thank you. Mr. Sedney.

Mr. SEDNEY. As I said, I think the situation in Afghanistan is worse today than people realize, and next year it is going to be much worse. We need an immediate reevaluation of our policies. I would urge Congress to take the lead in calling for such a study and for Congress to fund such a study to force the administration to go ahead and relook at it and bring in other voices besides the political ones that you mentioned before to look at it, people like Dr. Kagan, people who know the situation.

Secondly, Pakistan. Pakistan is not only not doing what it can to make Afghanistan more stable. What Pakistan is doing is making it less stable. You mentioned that you have before you aid packages for Pakistan. While Pakistan in some areas has helped us, in other areas it has not. I urge Congress to take very seriously the opportunity to put pressure on Pakistan to do the right thing and make Afghanistan safer.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You can't look at Afghanistan as a stand-alone. You are right. Pakistan is part of that. Thank you. Dr. Wilder?

Mr. WILDER. Yes. Thank you. There is a tendency in these hearings, but also in the media to have all the news, the doom and gloom from Afghanistan. And I think the situation is, indeed, very serious, and we need to take it seriously. But I think we also need to put into perspective the incredible achievements that we have attained in Afghanistan.

I mean, in my wildest imagination as the Save the Children Director working in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in the 1990s, I could not have imagined that we would have achieved by 2015 what we have achieved in terms of progress, in terms of women's rights, social indicators, the media revolution, where Afghanistan has one of the freest medias in the region, and I could go on and on. So I think it is really important to remember those tremendous gains that have been made but could be lost, which is why I come back to my point of the need to remain engaged is the single most important message I would have today.

I think 5 or 6 years ago I was testifying on the Senate side and arguing that we were actually trying to spend far too much money in Afghanistan, you know, far too quickly and that that scale of funding that we are trying to spend in the most insecure areas of

Afghanistan was fueling the corruption that was delegitimizing the government that was fueling the insurgency and so having all these perverse consequences.

My concern today is that we not go from that extreme of trying to do too much in Afghanistan to the other extreme of doing too little in Afghanistan. We need to find the balance of how do we remain engaged in a much more sustainable way than before but for the long term, because as I said in my opening remarks, we paid a heavy price before when we walked away from Afghanistan prematurely. And I really think that to protect the U.S. national interests in Afghanistan, we need to remain engaged for the long-term. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Wonderful statements. Thank you to our excellent panelists. And with that, the subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:48 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

November 20, 2015

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

DATE: Wednesday, December 2, 2015

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Assessing the President's Strategy in Afghanistan

WITNESSES: Frederick W. Kagan, Ph.D.
Christopher DeMuth Chair and Director, Critical Threats Project
American Enterprise Institute.

Mr. David S. Sedney
Senior Associate
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Andrew Wilder, Ph.D.
Vice President, Asia Programs
United States Institute of Peace

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East and North Africa HEARINGDay Wednesday Date 12/2/15 Room 2172Starting Time 2:00 p.m. Ending Time 2:40 p.m.Recesses 0 (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒Executive (closed) Session ☒Televised ☒Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Assessing the President's Strategy in Afghanistan

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps. Chabot, Weber, DeSantis, Clawson, Zeldin, Connolly, Cicilline, Meng, Frankel and Boyle.

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

*None*HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

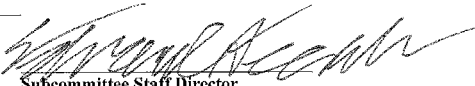
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

SFR - Rep. Connolly

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 2:40 p.m.
Subcommittee Staff Director

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY ANDREW WILDER, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT,
ASIA PROGRAMS, UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE



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Reviving Afghanistan's Economy

Summary

- Expectations about reviving Afghanistan's economy need to be modest and must start with a more effective Afghan government acting in a unified manner as if the country faced a national emergency.
- Business-as-usual approaches by the government or the international community will not succeed in reviving the Afghan economy.
- This brief puts forward some outside-the-box ideas, which, combined with greater government effectiveness and, hopefully, reductions in violent conflict, may help turn the economy around.
- Key proposals include creating fiscal space through modest government borrowing, regularizing informal urban settlements, starting a few sizable infrastructure projects, selected urban jobs and income support programs, imposing moderate import duties on agricultural cash crops (not wheat), and promoting exports of high-value cash crops through export promotion grants.

¶¶ Rather than engaging in political infighting and short-run positioning, Afghanistan's NUG instead should begin to act more like the unified government of a country facing a national crisis. ¶¶

Need for Modest Expectations

Reviving the Afghan economy in this time of intensifying violent conflict and declining external financial inflows will be extremely challenging—some might say impossible. But measures to address the deteriorating economy cannot wait until the conflict abates and deep-seated political issues are fully resolved. Given the nature of Afghanistan's conflict and its economy, conventional business-as-usual economic approaches won't work. There is a need to think creatively while recognizing the limits to what can be accomplished in a time of war. This brief tries to think outside the box on how to help stimulate some degree of economic revival. (A longer report explaining these and other ideas in greater detail will be forthcoming.)

Afghanistan can be characterized as a demand-driven, supply constrained, and very open economy that faces an enormous structural fiscal gap and extremely high dependency on international aid. Over the past several years, the sharp decline in international military expenditures caused a major negative demand shock. The slowdown in economic growth from over 9 percent per year during the previous decade to as low as 1.3 percent in 2014 also reflects loss of business and consumer confidence, lack of private investment, very low public investment, and deepening uncertainty over the political transition and security outlook. The slow start and continuing weaknesses of the national unity government (NUG) have further contributed to uncertainty and anemic demand and investment. Capital flight and human flight, already significant, have worsened in the past year.

Economic growth can be expected to remain low—perhaps in the 2–4 percent per year range, meaning little or no rise in average per capita incomes given high population growth. Even this modest growth scenario is vulnerable to political, security, and climatic shocks. Avoiding negative growth, and reducing the volatility of growth, would constitute a genuine accomplishment in this situation. In the short run, even worse than economic weakness is the fiscal crisis.¹ Expectations about turning around both the economy and the fiscal crisis need to be modest—and the overall fiscal gap, well into the double digits as a ratio to gross domestic product (GDP), can only be bridged by aid for the foreseeable future.

What Can Be Done?

Measures to promote a modest economic revival must start with political leadership. Around the world, “unity governments” cobbled together due to domestic political problems that could not be handled through the normal political process typically have short time horizons, struggle to function effectively, are unstable, and frequently fail (leading to new elections in parliamentary systems). There is, however, a different, more promising model: national unity governments formed by the coalescence of different political groups in response to what, by consensus, is perceived as a “national emergency.”² Rather than engaging in political infighting and short-run positioning, Afghanistan’s NUG instead should begin to act more like the unified government of a country facing a national crisis—which it clearly does—and focus on addressing the very serious challenges in the current situation. While this may seem naïve and unrealistic, it represents a first outside-the-box idea.

Turning to the economy per se, macroeconomic measures can be divided into three categories: those which build confidence and stimulate overall demand, or at least mitigate the drop in demand; those which shift demand toward domestic supply and away from imports, or stimulate exports to exploit foreign demand; and those which ameliorate the fiscal crisis.

Measures to Increase Confidence and Stimulate Demand

Offsetting the negative demand shock of declining international military spending and aid will be impossible. Significant amounts of Afghan private capital are being held outside the country—probably tens of billions of dollars—which could be repatriated and invested productively in Afghanistan, but this cannot be expected to happen unless there is greater confidence in the future, a more effective NUG, and prospects for reduction of violence and progress of reconciliation. Within a broader context where improvements are taking place in at least some of these areas, a few specific measures are put forward below.

Starting sizable infrastructure projects. While large infrastructure projects have long gestation periods and enhance the supply capabilities of an economy only over time, starting a few projects now would have concrete short-run benefits. They would begin to increase demand for labor, goods, and services. More important, credible infrastructure project starts would send a strong signal of both government and donors’ commitment to the medium-term development agenda, in turn increasing confidence among the population and the private sector. It would be necessary to focus on only a small number of key projects, not spread limited resources across numerous separate, underfunded public investments.

Regularizing informal urban settlements.³ Rapid urbanization in Afghanistan has occurred mostly through informal settlements (often on public land), where residents lack legal claim to the land they are occupying. Surveying these settlements and providing official documentation and

legal security of tenure for resident households would boost confidence, lengthen time horizons, and provide stronger incentives for such households to make improvements to their properties. The Afghan government is already pursuing such an initiative, which needs to be supported and could be accompanied by modest, publicly funded improvement programs (streets and pathways, basic services, etc.). This is a low-cost way to enhance confidence and the sense of security for large numbers of relatively poor urban residents, while at the same time generating a moderate increase in demand in the economy.

Implementing selected urban income support and jobs programs. Resources for development programs are woefully inadequate, especially for new initiatives of any size. In the short run, therefore, drastic prioritization is called for, and only programs that achieve multiple objectives in building confidence, increasing demand at least modestly, and alleviating poverty can be considered. This rules out massive rural programs, which would spread resources thin and would not have a visible impact in the short run. Selected urban public works and income support programs, well designed and effectively implemented with good governance and focused on a few large cities, would have better prospects to further short-run goals and, in conjunction with other measures, to help break out of the current economic impasse.

Shifting Demand from Imports to Domestic Supply and Stimulating Exports

In Afghanistan's ultra-open economy, measures to increase demand will not necessarily translate into higher national production and incomes because a large part of higher demand will be met by imports. A promising but little considered option is to nudge the composition of demand away from imports and toward domestic production, provided this is done in sectors where a domestic supply response is possible. Increasing exports likewise would stimulate domestic production and incomes.

Spending programs that target the poor would increase domestic demand since the poor tend to spend a larger part of their budgets on domestic goods and services. These types of programs would have both macroeconomic and poverty reduction benefits and could be funded by increased public resources (including through aid) and/or by shifting resources from lower-priority activities.

Increasing local procurement through greater preference for Afghan companies in government tenders, as well as domestic content requirements incorporated in contracts, is another option that is already being pursued but perhaps can be taken further. Such measures need to be supported over the medium-term by efforts to enhance the supply capabilities of the Afghan economy, such as infrastructure investments, building human capital in a demand-responsive manner, improving the business climate for the private sector, and developing business support services.

Imposing moderate import duties on agricultural cash crops is a more radical option for demand switching. This sector comprises one of the country's only areas of comparative advantage, but its potential has not been realized and is threatened by low-cost competing imports of many agricultural products that flood the Afghan market. A modest, broad-based, and undifferentiated import tariff would help contain imports of vegetables and fruits that can be and are grown in Afghanistan, stimulating domestic production of these goods. Food-grain (primarily wheat) should not be subject to such a tariff since it is disproportionately consumed by the poor and is not the crop of Afghanistan's future.⁴

Export promotion grants. A plethora of value-chain weaknesses and obstacles prevents good potential for exports of high-value agricultural cash crops from being realized. One approach, not yet tried in Afghanistan, takes as its inspiration the "contract farming" model, where businesses in

developed countries (grocery chains and the like) contract with farmers in developing countries to grow agricultural products, working closely with them to meet importing countries' standards. Rather than trying very imperfectly to substitute for the private sector through fragmented public investments and programs, a better option would be to make it worthwhile for businesses at the demand end to engage in something like contract farming in Afghanistan. While such businesses are deterred because of insecurity, poor governance, difficult logistics, and associated high costs, the Afghan government could, with donor funding, provide competitively tendered export promotion grants that offset the extra costs of doing business in Afghanistan and make it attractive, or at least feasible, for foreign businesses to engage in this way.³ These grants would have to be performance-related (contingent on actual exports and sales) and time-bound (e.g., for a period of 2–3 years, after which they could be competitively rebid). Where a value chain blockage is due to government-related problems (e.g., delays at the border/airport), it would be brought to the attention of the Afghan government and donors for resolution.

Creating Fiscal Space

More fiscal space, as well as providing greater resources for development programs, will help address the fiscal crisis. Increasing revenues, lowering and restructuring expenditures in favor of higher-priority spending, and government borrowing can create fiscal space. The first two approaches are being actively pursued, but there has been virtually no consideration of borrowing.

In a stagnant economy with low inflation and no near-term balance of payment problems, tight fiscal policy is a harmful contractionary force. In the current situation, modest government borrowing and associated fiscal deficits would moderately stimulate the economy, and at least would not make the situation worse. The government ran monetized fiscal deficits on the order of 1–2 percent of GDP in 2013 and 2014 by running down its deposits at the central bank, but this is no longer possible since such deposits have been largely exhausted. The government therefore should borrow directly from the central bank and could also issue bonds (e.g., Islamic bonds, *sukuk*) for sale to the Afghan public. Indeed, if the government starts acting like the unified government of a country facing a national emergency, "patriotic bonds" potentially could mop up a part of the enormous wealth accrued by some Afghans over the past dozen years.

Any government borrowing would need to be limited and responsible. Borrowing from the central bank should be limited to no more than around 2 percent of GDP, and inflation and exchange rate trends would need to be monitored. Borrowing in domestic currency from the Afghan public is feasible but requires debt sustainability analysis. The riskiest form of government borrowing—on foreign markets and denominated in foreign currency—may not be appropriate for Afghanistan at this point in time.

Critical Mass and Donor Support

A modest economic revival in Afghanistan will come about not as a result of any individual measure but through a combination of actions that, taken together, achieve a critical mass that may be able to break through the severe headwinds the economy faces. Restoring confidence will be critical to raising demand and, over time, unlocking the large amounts of Afghan money potentially available for private investment. If the Afghan government does take serious action to revive the economy—including not least through greater political effectiveness—donors should respond proactively, not with business as usual. The international community will need to be supportive of responsible government borrowing, provide advisory and technical support for macroeconomic

PEACEBRIEF

Reviving Afghanistan's Economy

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief, while calling for modest expectations, puts forward some outside-the-box ideas, which, combined with greater government effectiveness and, hopefully, reductions in violent conflict, may help turn the Afghan economy around. William A. Byrd is a senior expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He has been following the Afghan economy closely since 2001. Extensive comments and inputs from Scott Smith, and comments from Andrew Wilder and Colin Cookman, are gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Institute of Peace, which does not take policy positions.

management and to help design and implement the programs described in this brief as well as others, and be willing to reallocate and front-load aid to support promising initiatives as they are developed. Working closely with the Afghan government, donors should review and restructure their aid portfolios to shift funding toward activities that disburse more quickly and achieve faster economic and development results.

Notes

1. See William A. Byrd, "Afghanistan's Continuing Fiscal Crisis: No End in Sight," Peace Brief no. 185, Washington, DC, U.S. Institute of Peace, May 2015, www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB185-Afghanistans-Continuing-Fiscal-Crisis-No-End-In-Sight.pdf.
2. For a discussion on experience with unity governments in other countries, see Thomas Ruttig, "Elections 2014 (50): Experience with 'Governments of National Unity' Elsewhere," Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 16, 2014, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/elections-50-experience-with-governments-of-national-unity-elsewhere/>.
3. This idea has been inspired by Hernando de Soto, among others. See de Soto's books, *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989) and *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
4. The real potential for agricultural development lies in high-value, labor-intensive cash crops, which are more appropriate for Afghanistan's resource endowment and constraints.
5. Many larger companies in developed countries have corporate responsibility objectives and programs, and some of them may be interested in participating in this kind of scheme from that perspective.



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Statement for the Record
Submitted by Mr. Connolly of Virginia

Our military and foreign assistance strategies in Afghanistan and Pakistan must reflect the reality that there cannot and will not be an overwhelming U.S. military presence in Afghanistan in perpetuity. Self-sufficiency in the areas of security and economic development must be our goals for Afghanistan. Domestic and foreign threats to Afghan stability and hindrances to effective reconstruction and relief initiatives should be considered direct threats to our mission and our personnel that do remain in country. We cannot be satisfied to trudge along in Afghanistan amassing an ever larger number on our ledger for investment, while ignoring the forces that actively undermine the effectiveness of U.S.-led assistance.

A major determining variable for U.S. decision-making and military policy in Afghanistan is the ability of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to provide security within the country and prosecute threats from insurgent groups – including Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Despite an overarching goal to unwind the U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan, there is little incentive to leave the country's security entirely in the hands of the ANDSF if doing so would destabilize regions of Afghanistan, allow terrorist groups to proliferate, and permit the Taliban to regain territory. However, if a competent and well-resourced ANDSF able to secure the Afghan countryside is the threshold we must reach to bring home U.S. soldiers, shrink the U.S. military's footprint in Afghanistan, and bring stability to a volatile region, the effort must receive our primary attention.

However, more personnel and arms are not the only prescriptions for what ails the ANDSF. The ANDSF suffers from countervailing forces that are, in many ways, intertwined with the needs of the rest of the country. For example, U.S. military commanders have repeatedly cited illiteracy as a major obstacle to ANDSF autonomy. In a country with 38 percent literacy – one of the lowest rates in the world – the shortcomings of the ANDSF are just symptoms of the systemic problems facing the people and institutions of Afghanistan. Though goals have been set for literacy rates among ANDSF personnel, they have not been met. Training within the ranks of the ANDSF alone will not create the pool of literate recruits necessary to replenish forces that suffer from high attrition and casualty rates – only an improved education system can. In that respect and many others, the fate of the ANDSF is closely linked to progress and development in Afghanistan.

Addressing other endemic issues such as corruption and human rights abuses will also be vital to building a competent ANDSF. Earlier this year, the *New York Times* reported on Afghan military commanders practicing *bacha bazi* – literally translated as “playing with boys.” It was also reported that U.S. troops were instructed to ignore the practice. I welcome the action taken by General John Campbell to reiterate to troops conducting Resolute Support Mission that they should follow the policy in place since at least 2011 and report human rights abuses to the chain of command. It would be an additionally

welcome development if the Afghan government would criminalize the practice of *bacha bazi* in the best interests of the young boys targeted for abuse.

The ANDSF has received more than \$65 billion from the U.S. since 2001 for equipment, training, and personnel, including \$4.1 billion for such purposes in FY2015. The Iraqi Armed Forces (IAF) received \$25 billion dollars for the same purposes and collapsed in 2014 in the face of a sweeping offensive by ISIL. The U.S. has since ratcheted up troop commitments in Iraq and renewed airstrikes against Iraqi insurgents.

While the two theaters are substantially different, Afghanistan has its own insurgency problems – that now include ISIL – and we can learn from the lessons in Iraq where operational competence was gutted in the interest of sectarian favoritism. The U.S.-brokered power-sharing agreement between President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Dr. Abdullah Abdullah is a promising departure from what we witnessed in Iraq. However, problems along this vein remain. The Afghanistan Ministry of Defense has not had a confirmed minister since September 29, 2014, and a confirmed candidate would demonstrate shared resolve on security and defense, notoriously difficult issues to navigate in Afghan politics.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reports that conflict in Afghanistan is not subsiding, and the Taliban's recent but brief capture of Kunduz was its first takeover of a major city since it was driven from power in 2001. In response to the situation on the ground, the President has revised his timetable for a troop drawdown. There are currently 9,800 U.S. troops in Afghanistan instead of the planned 5,000 and the post-2016 force levels will remain above 5,000 soldiers as opposed to the 1,000 troops the President previously announced.

To ensure the U.S. drawdown does not create a vacuum, there are regional influences that the U.S. must work hard to align with our interests in Afghanistan. Promoting cooperation with Pakistan and blocking the assistance Iran provides to the Taliban are essential components to a regional strategy for the advancement of Afghanistan. U.S. initiatives in Afghanistan are sometimes frustrated by Pakistan. Afghanistan shares a 1,600 mile border with Pakistan, and it is in the mountainous border regions of both countries that Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have taken refuge. The U.S. has significant leverage with Pakistan. The U.S. is Pakistan's largest trading partner and has provided more than \$5 billion in assistance to the major non-NATO ally since 2009. The U.S. must use that leverage to demand cooperation from Pakistan in defeating threats from insurgents.

There are U.S. soldiers who are risking their lives and incredible amounts of U.S. funding being put to work within Afghanistan, and we must have a clear understanding of how those resources are best put to use. To that end, the work of Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) John Sopko has been invaluable, and SIGAR's mission must be supported. In a June 10, 2014 MENA Subcommittee hearing, SIGAR Sopko and Mr. Johnson from GAO stated that they could not provide metrics for the percentage of funds – out of the more \$100 billion that has gone towards relief and

reconstruction - that were well-spent or wasted in Afghanistan, because the raw numbers did not exist. This is a systemic failure that must be addressed - especially as we increasingly rely on indirect oversight in the nearly 80 percent of the country to which U.S. personnel does not have safe and direct access.

I welcome testimony from our witnesses on how the U.S. can help realize a secure and stable future in the hands of the people of Afghanistan. This must include an Afghan government that can protect its citizens and provide the kind of security that breeds hope and protects precious investments in human capital.

